

FILMS

THE WAY OF THE CINEMA

BY
ANDREW BUCHANAN

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MR. ANDREW BUCHANAN has been associated with the cinema for more than twelve years. He has produced over three hundred reels of Interest Films, and his work is familiar to cinema-goers throughout Great Britain. His treatment of subjects is as unusual as his witty and informative style. His work has thus given him experience of every aspect of film production, both silent and sound, indoors and out of doors, in studios and in public places, with celebrities, with professional film actors, and with no actors at all.

Besides writing scenarios, Mr. Buchanan has several plays to his credit, a volume of essays, and many humorous articles, dealing with both the screen and the stage.

His qualifications for writing this book are possibly unique: he combines with his wide experience and essentially practical business outlook a view of the future of the cinema which is the outcome of an exhaustive study and constant contact with the realities of film-making, yet is unhampered by the accepted traditions of the industry to-day.

His book suggests immense possibilities for the commercial cinema, and at the same time reduces to a practical basis the opinions of the film amateurs among the "intelligentsia."

"Every man is in his own way an artist, because every man at some time or another has had those strange experiences which have nothing to do with the business of daily life. The mathematician, the biologist, the grocer, the clerk, the painter, the musician, the poet, all at some time or another, in the midst of what is merely a mechanical functioning, and habit of work, have had moments which came like a flash, when something hidden in them was about to change. Suddenly a sense of life! Art is only a sense of life at the instant of creation. But infinite are the things created—multifarious and intangible and imponderable! Do not let us think of those things only as created which are locked up in a few physical and intellectual appearances. The clerk who has never written a sonnet, or painted a picture, or begotten a child, is yet not empty and devoid of creation. For he may create himself, and he may create through the mind and body of another, since he may be the cause and the occasion of creation in some other soul. Therefore, the artist will not puff himself up but will be humble, for he is among his brothers always."

W. J. TURNER
(*The Aesthetes*)

"As we live, we are transmitters of life.

"And when we fail to transmit life, life fails to flow through us."

D. H. LAWRENCE
(*Pansies*)

EDITOR'S NOTE

"How much do we get out of life?"

The "Art and Life" Series asks the familiar question once more, and tries to suggest how it may be answered with more and more satisfaction and pleasure. What it proposes, in a phrase, is *the adventure of seeing what we did not see before*. The books in this series are meant to be guides, stimulants, and suggestions, rather than packets of facts to remember (though facts, we hope, are there in plenty). They are about such subjects as pictures, architecture, plays, books, music, and films—mainly subjects which are commonly called "the arts."

The arts are all ways of *talking* to one another, of communicating with one another, of preserving for each other and for those who come after us the most profound, most ecstatic, most moving or most amusing of our experiences, ideas, fancies, discoveries, arguments, dreams, complaints, shouts of joy. To learn to appreciate music, for example, is to open another door on life, like learning another language. To understand what the delicately-minded architect or furniture designer means to "say" to us opens another door; it permanently enriches the quality of our lives.

"Art," says the dictionary, "is skill, or the acquirement of skill." There are two aspects to every work of art—

book, picture, statue, play or film, Acropolis, gate-leg table or well-constructed petrol station—the two aspects of Creation and Appreciation. The purpose of the “Art and Life” Series is to show the *skill*, the unending and increasing pleasure, of cultivating appreciation, or taste. Even if Creation in the fullest sense must be for the few, while Appreciation is for all, it is insisted, in this series, that appreciation is itself a creative act; it demands a good, a trained appreciator, for to “appreciate” a work fully one must go through something of the mental processes—the creative processes—which the artist went through in creating it. We use the word “appreciation” in its true sense when we speak of appreciating good food and drink: any one can like any sort of food if he is hungry enough, but to *appreciate* it implies knowing delicate tastes from coarse, and the value of the difference between one sort of taste and another. We may become mentally and spiritually ill through neglecting our powers of “taste,” as we may become physically ill through a wrong diet: a red wall-paper, for instance, may irritate us as much, in time, as a diet of red peppers.

This series is not a series of textbooks in the ordinary sense: the idea is to present as many facets as possible of the approach to the arts, as many stimulations to appreciation as possible, and some explanations of difficulties which the authors have found, in their teaching or other experience, to be the commonest barriers to enjoyment. We want to send the reader out to the picture galleries,

to the theatres and cinemas, to the concert-hall, and to other people's books, with such a sense of discovery that the base word "highbrow" shall lose its meaning for him. The most "modern" of statues, the most "difficult" of books, the works of all the arts, must have their roots in the life around us, and the authors of this series believe profoundly that an appreciation of this would do more than anything else to destroy the common impression of the alleged "dullness" of life in this "mechanized" age. Actually the arts are flourishing unprecedentedly in this age of machinery. Their works are there in the public streets and public libraries; they reach us through the cinema and across the ether. To "appreciate" them, to meet them half-way, costs a negligible number of shillings, and involves an enthralling process of self-education. The purpose of the "Art and Life" Series is to assist that process.

If you seek a justification for the arts you will surely find it in the memorable moments they can give, memorable over years, ecstatic as young love, or illuminating as a sudden shaft of sunlight: the way a book can recreate spring in your mind, or a blaze of music from an organ lift you to delight, the excitement at a man standing and turning in his stirrups against the skyline at the cinema, the sense of pride and well-being at walking down a majestic avenue lined with trees and aspiring, beautifully-proportioned buildings. You would be wrong to think of these moments as small things; they were

moments that you shared with others, and they were moments of communication from other persons to you. "Art," says John Galsworthy, "is the one form of human energy which really works for union and destroys the barriers between man and man. It is the continual, unconscious replacement of one self by another."

W. W. M.

(The reader is further referred to the General Introduction to the Series, prefaced to Volume I—*Economics*.)

Grateful acknowledgments are due to Mr. W. J. Turner and his publishers, Messrs. Wishart & Co., for permission to quote the passage from *The Aesthetes*, on page vi.

PREFACE

EVERY serious thing has its funny side, but, until recent years, the Cinema was regarded as a funny thing without a serious side. To the thinking person, films did not matter. They were absurd, crude, sensational, dangerous.

To-day, however, the attitude of the serious-minded person towards the Cinema has entirely changed, for it has come to be regarded as the most powerful medium of expression. Both as an entertainment and an educator, it is receiving the attention of students of the arts.

Films have received more than their share of abuse, much of which, I feel, would have been withheld had the critics possessed a greater knowledge of the business (or art) of film production.

There are many admirable books on the Film, but nearly all of them are of either a wholly technical or a wholly critical nature; and so I have attempted to condense into the pages of this book a comprehensive survey of everything connected with film-making—technical, dramatic, and critical—and I hope the reader will gain from it an insight into the fascinating work. A greater understanding of the subject enables one to realize to a fuller extent the limitless possibilities of the Film, and the increasingly important part it is going to play in the future. It can no longer be disregarded by any one who is interested in the welfare and progress of civilization, for it has found a place among the arts, thereby demanding recognition.

That there is a great deal that is wrong with the Film few will deny. Some attribute its shortcomings to the fact that it is in its infancy. Others say that the creative spirit has been stripped of its originality, and is subjected to the dictates of commercialism. The condemnation of the theoretical "highbrow," the complacent confidence of the practical magnate, and the achievement of the Soviet producer are but three of the contrasting attitudes towards the Film out of which a compromise has to be made before real progress can commence.

In my criticism, I outline alternative methods of approaching Production, which should result in making the Film an *independent* medium of expression, and whether or not the reader finds himself in agreement with these views, I hope they will offer considerable food for thought.

Mine is no "highbrow" attitude. On the other hand, I am not blinded by the material success of the Film to the fact that its foundations are not secure enough to last indefinitely, unless strengthened, if not entirely relaid. Rather do I believe that the Film of the future will be the creation of people possessed of finely balanced minds, who are not unduly influenced either by the demands of pure aestheticism or gross commercialism. There should be a place for everybody in the making of the universal Film, providing everybody keeps in his place.

I am indebted to Mr. Leslie Eveleigh, F.R.P.S., for information relating to some of the recording apparatus, and to all the firms by whose kind permission the illustrations appear.

ANDREW BUCHANAN.

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FILMS

CHAPTER I

ATTITUDES towards the Cinema—The history of the Film—Early Experiments—Fifteen years ago—Stage v. Screen—Seen but not heard

A SUCCESSFUL film producer once remarked to me that the most striking feature about a cinema was the audience. It interested him far more than the programme, and that is why he is successful, for he studies his public. He is a British producer, and, unlike several of his contemporaries, does not permit American productions to influence his own work unduly.

Long ago, Hollywood X-rayed the mind of the public, dissected it, bottled it; indeed, some declare it has been so badly operated on that it is beyond healing. Be that as it may, if you wish to meet the people who are absolutely confident that they know what the public wants you will find them in the film industry, on both sides of the Atlantic.

The chief concern of Filmdom is to satisfy, or rather leave hungry, the "Fan"—for he is the salt of the box-office. Countless millions regularly patronize the cinema, the most enthusiastic attending at least three times every week, followed closely by the "I always go twice a week to the pictures" group, and the others, hardly "Fans," whose chief relaxation is a weekly visit to the cinema. Fans know a great deal more about the Stars than those

overworked idols know themselves. Bedrooms are papered with signed photographs; strict accounts are kept of all the divorces their favourites enjoy; and, most important of all, the Fans are the sternest critics the Stars have to face, for the regular picture-goer concentrates more upon the cast than the film; and hence the Star system, which we shall examine later.

Less infatuated people of average intelligence find a great deal of pleasure in visiting cinemas every month or so, and one invariably finds that their opinions of productions are more logical than the hysterical cheerings or jeerings of their over-enthusiastic neighbours.

For Fans, there are recipes which cannot fail—film fare remarkably like the Sunday joint—except that it is served up for months instead of the proverbial week. Sometimes the dish is cold, often it is spiced, and it is always hidden by the elaborate dressing with which the Hollywood chefs adorn it. It is easily digested, so easily, in fact, that Fans leave with an empty feeling, which is just what their hosts wish them to do. Such films are responsible for the lack of interest shown by the other body of people who “hardly ever go to a cinema, unless there’s something good on.” The fundamental difference between the Fan and the occasional patron is that the former goes to *the* pictures, whilst the latter goes to see *a* picture—a picture, moreover, which, for some special reason, has a definite appeal. Maybe, it is an adaptation from a novel which has impressed the more thoughtful picture-goer; or he may be acquainted with the foreign location in which the picture is set. Whatever the reason, discriminating patrons are most certainly on the increase,

as the film-makers well know. Such people, according to those in authority, are creating another public which "knows what it wants," from which we naturally infer that the Fan public does not know what it wants, or, to put it more clearly, "wants what it gets"—which is most certainly a credit to those who meet the perpetual demand.

And we must also consider the exclusive minority, which, for our purpose, has to be subdivided into two groups: firstly, those whose intelligence is definitely above the average, and, secondly, those whose rightful place is amongst the majority, but who have pitched their tents just inside the minority camp. The latter, of course, have nothing but contempt for the cinema. "Films are made by the brainless, for the brainless," they lisp. This view, however, is not held by serious-minded people. Recently, I asked a famous novelist what he thought about films, and he said that for a great many years he had tried not to think about them, but had been compelled, as time passed, to admit to himself that so great a medium of expression, possessing advantages over every other form, could no longer be ignored by an artist, whatever his mission might be. In its present state, the screen offered no practical opportunity for this writer to express himself, but he saw in the film the future of all the arts. Whether he is right will be discovered by those who come after us, but it is sufficient at this stage for us to satisfy ourselves that the film has made such extraordinary progress that only the brainless ignore it.

• And so we may say that the contemporary attitudes towards the cinema are: firstly, that of the Fans; secondly,

of the average patrons; thirdly, of the discriminating patrons (into which group we place students of all higher branches of film expression); and lastly, the contempt of the *poseur*.

Hollywood studies the Fans and the average patrons; Germany studies the discriminating patrons; Russia studies herself, and, incidentally, influences production everywhere else; whilst England has been rather inclined to study Hollywood, though she would refuse to admit it. Nobody studies the *poseur*, who, I am sure, creeps into cinemas whenever he can, unobserved!

When I was very young, I was given a present, the memory of which has remained vividly in my mind to this day. It was a queer little tin, round and black, with long, narrow, vertical slits at regular intervals on its side. It resembled a cake-tin without a lid. It stood on a pedestal, and a touch of the finger would send it spinning round. With this apparatus were a dozen strips of stiff paper on which were brightly-painted pictures, all of which seemed to me identical. These were placed, one at a time, round the inside edge of the tin. My mystification developed into something very like fear as I watched the pictures through the slits come to life. Every time I gave the tin a turn the clown began to topple off the red striped ball, and the black dog leapt over the black gate—more slowly every moment, as the tin slackened speed, until, when its movement was almost imperceptible, the pictures became blurred. Those were the first moving pictures, and in even cruder forms they had existed for years.

Doubtless you will remember the painted penny-in-the-slot machines on piers, and how you inserted most of your

face into the metal shield, placed your penny in, and beheld, in the brightly lit depths, a jumpy episode from life—the movement being achieved by the rapid and regular release of a pack of cards, each carrying the position of limbs, head, or eyes a fraction farther. A similar effect, familiar in the nurseries of both yesterday and to-day, is obtained with small bundles of pictures, no larger than tram tickets, which, when held firmly in one hand, and released by the thumb of the other, cause figures to move. Moving pictures, again!

I do not know to what extent Edison was acquainted with or influenced by these pastimes, but his name is immediately brought to my mind when thinking of the origin of the film, for almost fifty years ago he was busily engaged on creating “something” which, he hoped, would present moving images. That “something” materialized in the form of the now famous Kinetoscope, which, several years after its appearance, was manufactured and sold in comparatively large quantities in America. The Kinetoscope, in its original form, projected very short lengths of celluloid films, and performed the miracle of making a number of photographed pictures appear to the eye as one moving image.

There was, however, a serious drawback to the Kinetoscope, which was that only *one* person could view the “performance” at a time. This limitation enabled the now despised magic lantern to have a last laugh, for it could at least offer its lifeless views to a vast audience, whereas its flickering rival could present its magic to one only.

By 1895, many variations and improvements of the

Kinetoscope appeared in France and America, capable of showing short lengths of moving pictures to numbers of people simultaneously, by means of a longer "throw" and a larger screen. The films shown were examples of pure action, having no pretensions to being allied to dramatic art. They were subjects chosen specifically for showing the ability of the film to present movement—such as boxing matches, acrobatics, chases—practically the same idea which governed the selection of subjects for reproduction on the paper strips in the black tin.

It was not until eight or nine years later that attempts were made to tell a story with a film, which had then grown to the length of one thousand feet, taking fifteen minutes to project. Into that thousand feet, producers compressed all the most melodramatic episodes they could devise, which followed each other in rapid succession. Action, or rather exaggerated movement, was still the key-note of the successful film. And so, in disused assembly rooms, institutes, barns, and other uninviting places, people would gather together excitedly to witness the most amazing entertainment of all time. These performances were frequently punctuated by breaks in the films, which plunged audiences into darkness, sometimes for minutes, sometimes for ever.

Most of the early productions were of a sensational character—murderous cowboys galloping up and down dusty streets, for no apparent reason; express trains almost leaping from the screens; "comic" husbands throwing crockery at astonishing wives who were made up like circus clowns. The settings, or scenes, were extremely small, and usually consisted of painted

back-cloths, as used on the legitimate stage. These first "stories" could only be regarded as plots in comparison with the isolated action subjects which had preceded them. Judged on their own value, however, they possessed no story value, containing neither continuity nor logic. They were merely series of rather impossible happenings connected only by the characters, who appeared throughout. Yet they are not to be ridiculed, for they laid the foundations of the Film Story. Later, we shall see whether or not those foundations should be excavated again, or left alone to bear the weight of the cinema of the future.

The pioneers of the moving-picture business quickly discovered that the public presentation of films paid exceedingly well, and accordingly, accommodation and improved projection arrangements catered for larger and still larger audiences. The inevitable result was an increased output of productions, which, naturally, demanded greater facilities and gave employment to an ever increasing number of artists. Thus, studios came into existence; films grew longer, and a more or less logically constructed film drama superseded the first short action picture.

Two or three years before the War, film entertainments were becoming generally recognized throughout the civilized world, and American production was developing at top speed; in fact, it could just cope with the demand, for it was feeding the world with films.

In many "Electric Theatres," the proprietors, now known as Exhibitors, began by conducting their programme on theatre lines. This resulted in the most

expensive seats being in the front, within a few yards of the screen, which, in those days, was sometimes a suspended sheet that swayed whenever the door opened, causing the picture to slip on to the wall. The projection box often stood in the middle of the audience, surrounded by the cheaper seats. I wonder how many of those early patrons in the twopenny back seats realized they were in the best position, and the wealthier ones in the worst?

Rapid progress was made in Great Britain, Europe, and America, both in the matter of production and projection, the latter field embracing all the details comprehended by the word "showmanship." And then 1914 arrived, which completely paralysed the whole film industry, except in America, which was quick to grasp its opportunity of gaining a monopoly of the world markets. To a very great extent America owes her supremacy in film-making to the War, yet it is only fair to add that some other nations, had they been placed in a similar position, would not have been able to make the success of their chance that America has done. Furthermore, apart from the commercial aspect of the position, Europe was exceedingly grateful to Hollywood for her constant supply, during the dark years, of light amusing films which helped to distract both civilians and soldiers from the tragedy which had descended upon them. It is not surprising that the few British and European films which existed during the War were forgotten in the deluge of American productions, which were fast circulating throughout the world. Centres were established in every nation, East and West, and the distribution of pictures developed into the most important of America's

industries. She was determined to be in possession of every market by the time her competitors would be able to resume production, and she achieved her object. But her path, though clear of competition from the fighting nations, was extremely difficult, and credit is due to the way she overcame the serious financial obstacles which threatened to hold up her activities, for naturally the War did not leave America unaffected. On the contrary, it unbalanced her markets, and finance was not readily forthcoming for the production of pictures. Nevertheless, she overcame her difficulties, and her output during 1914-18 was ceaseless.

The several concerns in Great Britain which had started as producing companies before war broke out saved themselves from bankruptcy by buying and renting the vast American output, and, incidentally, found it to be a remunerative business.

The result was, and is, that the public definitely associate the cinema with American films, because for so many years they witnessed no others, and to-day such productions are still in the majority.

The invasion of the American film has resulted in a chorus of angry voices, which cry out about the Americanizing of the world. One feels, however, after reflection, that such national influence matters little, for the sentiments expressed by one civilized country are fundamentally the sentiments of every other country. What matters is not the fact that American films may be Americanizing us, but that they are saturating our minds with so great an amount of meaningless, materialistic matter. "Americanizing" is a misleading word—for the spirit of America is

not conveyed in her film productions to any greater degree than a true interpretation of British life is offered in our own modern film stories.

I should make it quite clear that I am endeavouring to write with an entirely unbiased mind on this point, offering praise just where I feel it is due, without taking into consideration the country of origin of a film or films, and therefore, whilst refraining from unduly praising or condemning America, I would emphasize the important point that she has kept the film industry in every nation in a flourishing state. It is indeed a startling fact which is often overlooked, that without American films there would be no film industry—for no other country is producing sufficient material to keep open the cinemas of the world.

This brings us to another interesting point. Is it not significant that audiences, British, European, and Eastern, have always been able to understand American silent films? Does not this fact show that America discovered, early, that the power of the film lay, primarily, in its universal appeal? She has always taken care that any of her national characteristics which might prove incomprehensible to foreigners are not included in her pictures. Only customs common to all are introduced, and though the plots may sometimes be unintelligent, they appeal, and earn money for their producers.

Commercially, therefore, America holds the same supreme position to-day as she did during the War.

Artistically—but dare we introduce the word so early?

After the War, America's competitors slowly began to

resume their producing activities, and the topic of the hour was America's great progress in film-making, and the enormous advantages she had over her less fortunate rivals. The question of competition is discussed as excitedly to-day as it was in 1918-19. We shall not, however, concern ourselves overmuch with the matter, as it would distract us from a subject of far greater importance—the actual progress made in film production. It is, of course, contended that the astounding development of the industry as a whole, to date, is the direct result of fierce competition, but I am inclined to reject the argument. The British film business as a whole, and particularly the commercial side of it, has paid too much attention to surpassing its competitors, and in the process has rather blinded itself to the important fact that it is imitating those it desires to defeat. In other words, the competitive spirit (not always a desirable thing) has resulted in Britain doing her utmost to produce pictures which attain the same technical perfection as American movies, and in doing so she has not only achieved her object, but has copied, as closely as her more limited resources will permit, the Hollywood film. She has consequently achieved little that is new. Certainly she has made good films, and continues to improve her production methods, but by these means alone she can never hope to oust America—if that be her intention—for she cannot produce sufficient films. She has not, presumably, understood that one outstanding British film, outstanding by reason of it being different—in appeal, treatment, or character—would do more to adjust the balance than the present output from English studios, which so closely

resembles the less ambitious productions from America. Russia, France, and Germany, have offered contributions to the screen which show originality of mind and a freedom from the tradition which has, ironically enough, come from America, the country with no traditions, save those created in Hollywood.

I would be more inclined to attribute the progress of the film to the efforts of the unknown engineers and scientists, who devote their lives to creating and perfecting sound systems, new processes, better lighting, colour photography, and the countless details which go to the making of the perfect picture.

To fully appreciate the advance, one must be able to differentiate between the medium and the subject. For example, it is quite probable that you have recently seen a "Feature" film, and possibly thought it ridiculous; the situations were improbable, the sentiment was overpowering, the close-ups were terrifying, and the voices were disillusioning. The theme was the same one as you have been confronted with for years, though dressed fashionably. Therefore, the film did not interest you, and you forgot it immediately you had left the theatre. If, however, you will endeavour to remember it, you will agree that the photography was beautiful, the settings were artistic, voices were clear, music was soft, and the camera-work ingenious. Naturally, none of those aspects struck you, for the dullness of the subject-matter killed your interest. That example is typical of the Film and public reaction to it. True, more and more people are taking an active interest in the technical side of production, and appreciating the work done in studios, but

generally speaking, an audience judges a picture on its human appeal, caring nothing for the technicalities of production. To bring the Film to its present state of perfection, years of research, study and expense have been necessary. And the result would appear to be that producers, given such wonderful facilities, have not yet discovered how to utilize them to the best advantage.

Let us, therefore, remember, when considering the subject of Films that there are two distinct branches, working side by side, yet strangely independently—the technicians, and the producers.

Now let us recall the days when the Silent Film was established as a popular form of entertainment, but before it had reached the technical perfection we became accustomed to a few years ago. About fifteen years ago America was busily making Stars, having discovered that a good Star often makes a bad picture a commercial proposition. Hence the elaborately organized Star system of to-day. The names of John Bunny, Flora Finch, and Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Drew were becoming known throughout the world. This was the period when the Essanay dramas and the Keystone Comedies were popular, and Charlie Chaplin was the King of the Screen. Photography was good, as can be judged by the reissues of some of the early Chaplin Comedies to-day. The construction of plots, too, was improving. Rarely, however, was ambitious production embarked upon. Settings were unimaginative. Mary Pickford was doing some of her most sensitive work. Renters in London were all negotiating for the American output, and cinemas were springing

up everywhere. Commercially, those were golden days, and from the creative aspect, two important points present themselves for our study.

Firstly, a surprisingly large number of the early short films were nearer to the true cinema subject than many of the extravagant productions of to-day, for they were based on materials which, though having no pretensions to being logical, nor concerning themselves with pure imagery, were subjects which only the screen could interpret. Absurd though most of them were, many of the Ford Sterling comedies were brilliant in their conception of movement, and they exploited the camera to its fullest extent, which was not very considerable in those days; nevertheless, the effort was successful. These and the Chaplin Comedies were original, and until the cinema came into existence, such conceptions could not have been expressed.

Chaplin stands out alone, whatever one's personal attitude towards his performances may be. He was and is the most representative figure the screen has created. By some means, Chaplin discovered, apparently before any one else, that the cinema was a *new* medium of expression, demanding a *new* method of expressing life in terms of a curious kind of mime. He concentrated on finding just the right type of material with which to achieve this object, whilst others were concerned only with making pictures as quickly as they could, for a medium which they regarded as an offshoot of the legitimate stage. Accordingly, they raked out all the available old plays and plots, and transferred them to the screen, whilst Chaplin approached the problem from an entirely

different angle. He is of the screen—if it perished, so would he.

Nevertheless, another school, nearer to true cinema, though not quite so near as Chaplin, were the producers who saw infinite possibilities in setting their stories in natural surroundings. The result was the "Western" picture, which has persisted through the exciting years, and lives to-day. By reason of its thrilling character, it became by far the most popular type of film, and almost every programme included one. The name of Broncho Billy is called to mind, and later, William S. Hart, with the iron face and the strength of several herds of bullocks. In many of these films were moments of beauty—glimpses of trees and shadows and vast prairies, the rhythmic movement of galloping horses, and the tumult of raging waters. There was something more—invariably a good moral, reached, it must be confessed, after several reels of embarrassing situations, but nevertheless, a good moral. And so, despite the crudities and the sentiment, early films were paving the way definitely and speedily. They also provided a vehicle for Chaplin to ride on to fame.

They achieved more than we realize.

Most interesting of all, perhaps, was the fact that Sound peeped over the horizon, or rather over the velvet curtain which hid the orchestra from view, in those early days, for from almost the commencement we had the "Effects Man"—once heard never forgotten. I can remember him accompanying a wild western drama with his magical sounds—reproducing the thud of galloping hoofs with two halves of a coco-nut—always just late

enough to make his efforts amusing; or creating a loud bang just before the dainty hand of a heroine was raised to gently lift a knocker! His presence in the orchestra pit is of the greatest significance, for he shows that there has always been an instinctive desire to add Sound to the Moving Image. Early attempts were carried even farther, in fact, too far, by the tragic attempts of vocalists and elocutionists to speak for the characters on the screen—efforts which invariably led to the former losing by several sentences.

In attempting to build up a brief history of the early days of the Film, I should like to make it clear that I am treating the subject broadly, endeavouring to show the progress made, by describing a general standard of production at various periods, rather than frequently mentioning in detail actual productions which, I feel, will either never have been seen, or have been forgotten, by the reader. Later, outstanding productions will be taken as examples, and analysed, but for our purpose now, it will suffice to regard the industry as a whole, except when a particular production has definitely influenced the direction the Film has taken.

In this respect I have no hesitation in mentioning *The Birth of a Nation*, the mighty spectacle produced by David Wark Griffith in 1914—which was an immediate triumph by reason of its immensity—an advance on anything previously attempted, except, perhaps, the gigantic Italian productions. The sincerity of purpose and seriousness of outlook behind Griffith's film were felt by all who witnessed it, and, apart from its commercial success, it captured the interest of thousands of people who

previously had given no thought whatever to the cinema. And when later, Griffith produced *Intolerance*, he established both himself and the cinema in the minds of thinking people throughout the world. And then Super-Spectacle followed Super-Spectacle—the market was flooded with poor imitations of his work, until it became an exceedingly difficult task to stir the average film audience by spectacle alone, which resulted in a reversion to the film with a “good plot.”

Almost immediately after the War, Germany startled us all by showing just how the screen could be utilized when approached by creative minds recognizing no traditions, nor allowing themselves to be governed by the commercial requirements of the moment. The production with which she made her bow was *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari*, made by Robert Weine in 1919. Here was a challenge to the producer who saw in the screen but another medium with which to depict the usual drawing-room domestic drama which had already been read and heard, in the novel and on the stage, respectively. Intense imagination ousted the bogey of “realism,” and no one missed it. The audience was a component part of the production, its imagination being brought into play throughout, and the theme—the indescribable visions of a madman’s mind described! Not, perhaps, the jolliest of subjects with which to illustrate vividly the endless possibilities of the Film, but an example which was, from many points of view, wisely chosen!

But *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* was not, in the language of Wardour Street, a commercial proposition, for it *was not*, in the opinion of exhibitors, a popular

booking, and so, although it has been frequently shown—even in recent months (July, 1931), it did not achieve the financial success of the unimaginative crook, sex or ranch drama, which, of course, demands nothing of the imagination, and is as easily understood by Solomon Islanders as by the slowest thinking Scot who ever decided, reluctantly, to spend a few coppers at the pictures. And yet the interesting part is that *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* was every bit as understandable. It contained, however, none of the ingredients which exhibitors believed their patrons required.

British films came along well after the War, and the names of Violet Hopson, Stewart Rome, and many others float across our minds. Several companies were producing on a large scale, and their efforts were watched closely by all, and particularly by America. British producers, however, found themselves in a totally different position from their cousins, for the only revenue they obtained from their films was from bookings obtained in their own country, whereas America's vastness enabled her, in most cases, to regain her production costs from her own theatre-bookings, and to add to her profits by every foreign sale she made; her turnover, therefore, was considerable, for we must remember she had established her foreign markets during the War. Furthermore, she offered only those films which she knew would prove acceptable to foreign audiences.

Britain, on the other hand, made the mistake of producing films excellent in every way but possessing an insular appeal. They were made, apparently, primarily for the enjoyment of our own people, being based on

adaptations of famous British classics—which meant little or nothing in other countries. This is a fact which it is very hard for us to realize, even to-day. An American told me quite recently that we should not mistake his countrymen's liking for our antiquities and traditions for an equal liking for screen versions of our classical literature. Be that as it may, we certainly made spirited attempts to translate, in terms of the Film, most of the old novels and plays which are household words in British households only. It is not, therefore, surprising that such productions did not find a market in America. Naturally, producers became disgruntled, and in time were convinced that America was prejudiced against British films, which, in my own opinion, was an incorrect impression.

And what of American films? Are they not typically American? Definitely, they are, but with a fundamental difference. They are constructed so that they possess a universal appeal. If a story is built around the unsurpassed efficiency of the American navy, it is so told that the Navy is secondary to the story, and one loses sight of the fact that it is a foreign Navy which is the entertaining instrument. America has never pretended that her films are not American, either in sentiment or characterization, but everything is new and popularized. Everything and everybody in America—institutions, parks, the police, and the stores—are placed at the disposal of film producers, who exploit them. Here, although conditions are slowly becoming more favourable, it takes a considerable time to obtain permits offering even limited scope, and difficulties beset the camera-man at

every turn of the handle. Such factors are important, and enable one to visualize the great difference between British and American film production, and the light in which the latter was, and still is, regarded here.

In the early days, the Cinema did not unduly perturb either the stage or the music-hall, but as films became more popular, the theatrical profession grew anxious. This is not the moment for me to refer to the ultimate extinction of the music-hall by the cinema, but if it is consoling to lovers of the drama, I should like to mention that there seems to me little chance of a day arriving when the legitimate theatre will follow a similar fate.

Commercially, of course, stage and screen are rivals, but from no other angle can they be said to be connected with each other. Curiously enough, few people agree with this view, and they link both closely, thereby unconsciously undermining both. Personally I see no more connection between the two mediums than between Epstein's *Genesis* and a poem by W. H. Davies. The fundamental error has been, of course, in presenting stage plays on the screen—a policy which persists, and which proves commercially successful. It is, though, a dangerous policy, in so far as the *future* of the Film is concerned, but as those responsible are mainly concerned with the cinema of the present, it is likely to continue.

It is startling when one realizes that the Film, the newest, the greatest, and the most popular form of entertainment, relies chiefly on other mediums of expression for its material. It has never yet stood on its own feet, preferring to stand on everybody else's toes. Reasons are near to hand. Big successes on the stage are certain

“winners” for the screen; original stories are extremely doubtful: hence the present policy.

Nevertheless, despite the arrival of the dialogue picture, the stage need have no fear, for there is, after all, no comparison. And that may be said without showing preference for either. Stage and screen are fundamentally different in spite of the efforts of producers to make them identical, and when the Film finds its own feet, the difference will prove staggering.

Meanwhile, for the purpose of our examination, we must forget the cinema of to-day, and assume that it is still in its childhood days, when it was seen but not heard.

CHAPTER II

THE SILENT FILM

EARLY successes—How music plays its part—The Russian Film—
International appeal—Wardour Street—The Renter and the Quota

ENDEAVOUR, if you can, to forget the Sound film of to-day and regard the cinema as a hall wherein only Silent films are presented. The period we are about to examine commences in 1921, when ambitious "Features" were being shown, and a host of clever people were engaged in production. You will recall *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, directed by Rex Ingram, and starring his wife, Alice Terry, together with Rudolph Valentino—a most interesting film, adapted from, or rather based on the novel by Ibañez, with the aid of the Bible. This film made Rex Ingram. He skilfully blended all the ingredients which would ensure popularity, and infused the whole production with mysticism which was impressive, if not altogether necessary. Merely to conceive the idea of producing this subject was ambitious, but to have produced it was definite achievement. It was ahead of contemporary efforts, and combined intense drama with great pictorial beauty, the whole offering a fine moral and a wide appeal. Yet it was not without padding and irrelevancies which somewhat spoil continuity, and less of Valentino for Valentino's sake would have strengthened the production, though it would have reduced its commercial value.

A year later, a vivid personality strode into prominence, named Eric von Stroheim, who produced those amazing

films, *Blind Husbands* and *Foolish Wives*, which offered such opportunities for his curious genius. He acted in both productions, and, altogether apart from the viciousness of his themes, his work is to be praised for its originality. In the first place he did not regard pretty faces as essential to a successful film. Secondly, he gave the camera every chance to capture environment. Emphasis was on the surroundings in which the dramas were enacted. He turned the camera into an inquisitive visitor which picked out all the tell-tale signs by which the true characters of the inhabitants could best be diagnosed. Imagine the respectable, prim lady who is suddenly caught unawares by a knock at the door. Quickly, she snatches the washing hanging in front of the fire, and pushes it under the sofa; then, slowly and smilingly, she opens the door, and invites the caller in. If that caller had been Stroheim, he would probably have entered the room *first*, observed that the clock had stopped and the windows were dirty, and, with a sudden dive, would perceive the washing under the sofa. Each observation would be captured in a "close-up," and at leisure, he would assemble his "shots" in just the order which would most forcibly illustrate the fact that the powdered, smiling woman in the neat house was in reality a slapdash, careless, vicious woman of doubtful character. His outstanding production, made in 1923, was *Greed*. This extraordinary film, sordid in the extreme, placed him in the front rank of Directors. Throughout, there was no attempt to lighten the dreadful story of human greed for wealth. Had it emanated from German or Russian studios it would have been condemned as yet

another example of the work of the Morbidity group. Yet it was made on a lavish scale in Hollywood, and achieved considerable success. It was a depressing film, made interesting by Stroheim's method of giving prominence to details which others would regard as insignificant, which he practised to the fullest extent. Sordid scenes, squalor, murder—such were the ingredients, yet the genius of Stroheim for telling his story clearly and relentlessly, without once introducing an unnecessary incident, resulted in a production which gripped audiences, even though they longed for the film to end. I have mentioned at some length the work of Stroheim on account of the valuable contribution he has made to the screen by the method, described above, of drawing characters. In varying forms, this technique is being used by many producers to-day.

And then, during this period we were offered *The Ten Commandments*, *Noah's Ark*, *Ben Hur*, and a host of other Super-Spectacles. It is difficult to categorize these extravagant productions. Apart from the fact that they proved immensely popular, and were all big commercial successes, they contributed little to the progress of film art. Fred Niblo, producer of *Ben Hur*, introduced some unusual camera work, notably in the much-advertised chariot race. I forget the enormous cost of this film, and the number of people engaged to appear in it—details which were prominently displayed in all advertisements—but I do remember being impressed by the opening scenes of the Birth of Christ, with the star-lit heavens surrounding the humble Manger. These few pictures were beautifully treated, but, alas, were soon

forgotten in the tumult which followed. A complete lack of balance characterized the production. It was a "box-office winner" purely by reason of its sensational sequences, such as the whipping of the galley-slaves, and the exciting chariot races. Emphasis was given to such thrilling incidents, and, quite naturally, no prominence to the "story" of Ben Hur. Unless this had been done, of course, the "story" would not have been commercially filmable. The appearance of *only* the arm of the Carpenter of Nazareth struck an entirely false note, though, perhaps, it was the only conceivable way in which the Character could be presented in a "popular" manner.

In this respect mention might be made here of *The King of Kings*, which, I feel, was one of America's most serious mistakes, for the same forced religious appeal was apparent throughout, inextricably mixed up with the conventional sex and sentimental appeal. Only a remarkable degree of self-confidence, together with unlimited financial resources, could enable producing firms to tackle such subjects. Yet without those same resources, in other hands, we should not have that wonderful film, *The Covered Wagon*. This was directed by James Cruze in 1923, for the Famous-Players-Lasky Corporation, and fully deserved the great success it achieved. It was the Super-Western film, in which the magnificent scenery of the West was exploited to its greatest advantage. It told a fine story, and, in the great trek, all the courage and enduring qualities of man were illustrated in a natural and convincing manner. The picture was free of the theatricalism with which Hollywood imbued most of her spectacles. It was clean, vivid, and thrilling. The



PLATE I

magnificently controlled crowds, struggling beasts, and overwhelming hardships of the pioneers, were all captured by cameras content to do their work simply, without distracting the spectator by performing feats of conjuring-trick photography. Without question, *The Covered Wagon* was a great film, and firmly established the Western picture as something far more than a schoolboy's thriller.

The year 1923 was indeed important for, in addition to the above outstanding events, it will always be remembered as the year in which Chaplin produced his wonderful film, *A Woman of Paris*. Chaplin wrote and directed this delightful Feature, which starred Edna Purviance, and the now world-famous Adolphe Menjou. It created a sensation. Chaplin's absurdly shuffling figure was absent—but his other self was felt by audiences wherever the film was shown. Alone as always, he had been filled with a determination to show the power of the film to portray life vividly, and *differently*, and this piece of polished cynicism was hailed as a masterpiece; the over-worked word "technique" could justly be applied to his methods of production. The film was constructed on a perfect continuity—the story told subtly, each incident being a definite contribution to the climax. It was amusing, and tragic; it was hard, yet lightened by the genius of the world's "clown." The story mattered little intrinsically, though it was made to matter a great deal: a love story—disillusionment—suicide. The settings were made to serve a double purpose. The sumptuous furniture was gilded with irony. The beauty of the girl who went the way of the world was calculated to confuse the sympathies of any audience.

This film was the forerunner of the polished comedy of to-day, which Hollywood "discovered" later and now turns out with such mechanical efficiency. Chaplin's film was human—beneath the glitter lay truth, whereas in subsequent productions of a similar character, glitter hid nothing but glitter. And yet Chaplin's work did not give the impression that he was *striving* to produce something "artistic"; no straining after effect was apparent. It was all perfectly natural—inevitable. As I have previously said, very early films of a slapstick nature, making no conscious effort towards art, were more truly near to art than many recent colossal productions. But *A Woman of Paris* was something even more, being one of the outstanding contributions to the cinema which influenced directors in many directions—particularly in the use of the "close-up" for a legitimate purpose, instead of for emphasizing embraces which are, invariably, better illustrated in the longest of long shots.

Chaplin was busy in 1923—for he also produced *The Pilgrim*—his earliest "Feature" comedy, with Edna Purviance again. It was an immediate success, and two-reel comedies were no longer wanted from him. Henceforth it had to be a six-reeler or nothing, for he had shown it was possible to sustain his fun for an hour and a half. Perhaps *The Idle Class*, which preceded *The Pilgrim*, should also be mentioned, as together they formed the prelude to the great future which awaited Chaplin the artist, who has had the good sense to remain on the best of terms with Chaplin the clown.

Mention of Chaplin and *A Woman of Paris* must inevitably lead to thoughts of Lubitsch—the eminent

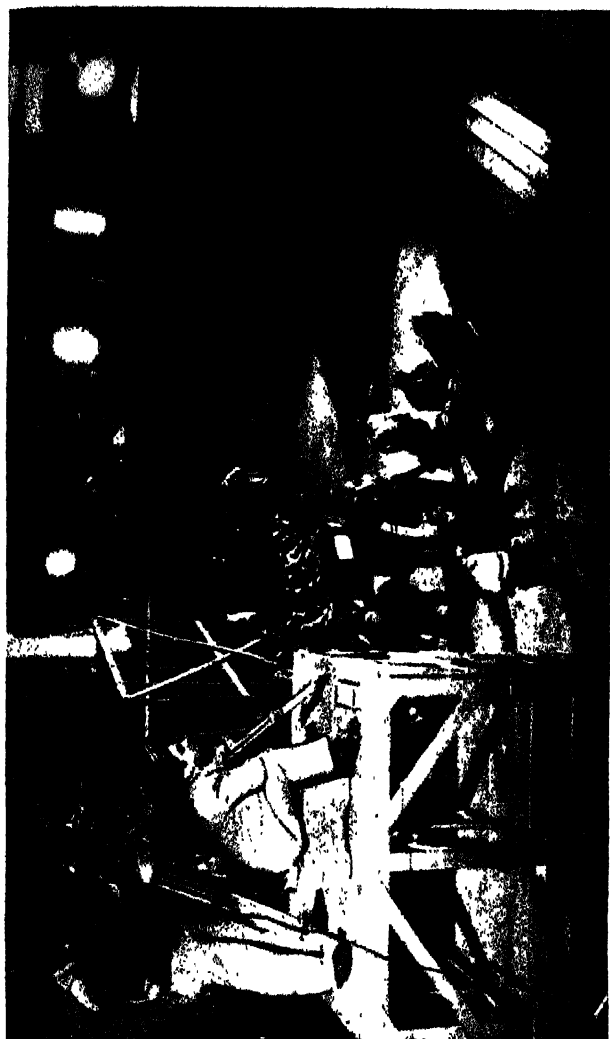


PLATE II
ERNST LUBITSCH DIRECTING *The Patriot*
Paramount

German director who, in 1924, showed his appreciation of Chaplin's great production by making, in Hollywood, *The Marriage Circle*—witty, technically brilliant, yet without the underlying seriousness of Chaplin's effort. Menjou starred in it, and the action carried the spectator to Vienna, Paris, and America. Though Lubitsch did not attempt to penetrate beneath the surface of the gay life he was portraying, there was apparent to me, throughout the production, the touch of the cosmopolitan which was lacking in Chaplin's film. This is an interesting point in exemplifying how the personality of a producer makes itself felt in his work. In the same year, Lubitsch completed his clever satire, *Forbidden Paradise*, starring Pola Negri. Of a Ruritanian setting, framed in German technique, Lubitsch made a wonderful film with almost a double appeal, for, on its face value, it was entertaining, spectacular, and lavish in the extreme, whereas discerning people quickly discovered that the whole production was a satire on Hollywood, its wealth, and its superficiality. Lubitsch must be considered when the progress of the Film is being studied, for he is one of the few men who have succeeded in making a compromise between the art of the German studio and the artfulness of Hollywood.

In the following year he produced Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, in which Ronald Colman made a successful appearance. This subject was obviously chosen to allow Lubitsch to continue his successful policy of making the polished comedy of which he was clearly master, and he has not, to my knowledge, made a failure—his productions being both gay and picturesque. His settings are always sufficiently exaggerated to be impressive,

without becoming ridiculously out of proportion. He is a man one can associate with silken curtains, elegant mirrors, gilded furniture and phrases, and a screen filled with a maximum of movement.

An interesting comparison arises out of this production, for the British concern, the Ideal Film Company, had produced *Lady Windermere's Fan*, several years previously, in which Milton Rosmer and Fay Compton starred. This same Company also made *A Woman of No Importance* during the same period, both films proving most acceptable contributions to the screen, and exceptions to the theory as to the inadvisability of adapting outworn classics for the screen. The English version of *Lady Windermere's Fan* was, of course, made on less ambitious lines than Lubitsch's film, yet it was adequate, and, in many respects, treated in a more concise way. Wilde's epigrams flitted on and off the screen in captions, mightily pleasing audiences which, in many cases, were making their first acquaintance with Wilde, the dramatist. Incidentally, Fay Compton made a number of extremely successful film appearances at this period, for in addition to the above productions, she appeared in Clemence Dane's *A Bill of Divorcement*, and also played the name part in *Mary, Queen of Scots*—both directed by the American director, Denison Clift, in England. The former was a particularly fine picture, based on a powerful dramatic plot. It was excellently photographed, the settings were spacious, and the characterization beyond criticism. Malcolm Keene played opposite to Fay Compton, and the pretty young American actress, Constance Binney, was brought over here specially to play second

lead to the English star. It is interesting to note that the reason for introducing an American into the cast was to increase the chances of the picture being accepted by the American market, which it was. I have little doubt that the appearance of Constance Binney contributed largely to the film's success in America, but as the production reached so high a standard I feel America would have been interested in purchasing it even had the cast been an all-British one. Nevertheless, the policy is an interesting one, for apart from the purely commercial reason of introducing foreign stars, it makes for the internationalizing of films.

Another extremely important year was 1925. Firstly, Chaplin made *The Gold Rush*, perhaps the finest of all his efforts. Here, at last, was the super-comedy, combining, with the utmost subtlety, original slapstick action, broadly humorous situations, genuine pathos, and no small amount of thrills. In this picture, Chaplin captured the essence of the pioneering spirit, and showed that it has its funny side. Every movement and each tragic pose burlesqued the world's adventurers in brilliant fashion. Who would plod through endless snows in a bowler hat? Who looks less like the strong, silent pioneer than any one else? Who can transform hardships into highly amusing situations without belittling them? Chaplin knows life—having been thoroughly schooled in the world of poverty. Hence his sureness, and his ability to portray emotions, experienced by all, with sufficient difference to cause amusement. He borrows the achievements of man, ridicules them, and puts them back on their respective pedestals again, undamaged.

The year 1925 is also noteworthy as that during which America's huge military effort was produced, *The Big Parade*. That versatile director, King Vidor, made it, and some of his best work is to be found therein. John Gilbert and the American Army were both starred. Many people in this country objected to the picture on the grounds that it showed America winning the War, and I well remember several becoming very excited about it, saying what a scandal it was that we should permit an American film to be shown over here which was definitely attempting to steal the laurels of victory from ourselves. Curiosity made me visit the Tivoli to see this "insidious feature," but its propaganda left me quite indifferent as to whether America was claiming to have won the War or not, particularly as every nation seemed to be claiming the same thing. However, the film started so impressively that I felt quite pleased I had gone to see it. Unfortunately, it soon weakened, and the American sentiment became too much for me. There were some marvellously constructed scenes of France, which I imagine were shot in Hollywood. These have been bettered in more recent films, but in 1925 they were the finest I had seen. Generally speaking, however, the film did not justify either its length, or the extravagant production bestowed on it. I imagine it had been the firm intention of the producer to make a dateless, universal film which would prove to be America's contribution to the records of the 'War, but it was not large enough in its vision, and too large in its bulk, to achieve that object.

. Whilst all this was going on, Germany happened to be carrying the Film several leagues forward. She had not

been saying a great deal, and obviously had no intention of allowing America to teach her how to "make movies." Instead, she quietly offered us, in this same eventful year, *The Last Laugh*, a film whose title was certainly symbolic of what she deserved to claim for herself thereby. F. W. Murnau directed this masterpiece for the Ufa Company of Berlin, and, equally important, Emil Jannings played the lead. With the possible exception of some Russian productions, which we shall review later, it seemed to me in 1925 that I had not seen so fine an example of perfect continuity before, nor have I witnessed many since, and it is inconceivable why such a film as this, which teaches almost the whole truth about film construction, should not have entirely altered the course of production. It was definitely a success, commercially and artistically, star and director scoring an equal triumph; in fact, only the closest co-operation between all concerned could have resulted in so fine a film. The story was there—human, dramatic, amusing, original. Acting was superb, offering Jannings opportunities to portray the range of his emotions. Direction was brilliant, and the camera-work unusually clever. When it is remembered that the film contained *no captions at all*, it will be instantly realized how perfect the continuity had to be to tell the story, clearly and smoothly, silent screen action being the only narrating vehicle. I thought at the time that the caption would thereafter die from natural causes, but it continued to interrupt every other film until it was finally shouted off the screen by the Dialogue picture.

And now we enter 1926, with a still greater advance in production methods. I do not, however, intend to devote

space to further comments on big pictures, save one, *Metropolis*. This film was produced by Fritz Lang, for Ufa, and the story was written by Thea von Harbou, his wife, I believe. It is one of the few films originally conceived for the screen and afterwards adapted for the novel, Thea von Harbou having written a popular book based on the story. The camera-work was in the magical hands of Rottaum and Karl Freund, the latter having done a considerable amount of work in British Studios subsequently. The settings, which, to my mind, overshadowed everything else, were created by Oscar Wernsdorf, the brilliant artist whose genius has been recently expressed in the beautiful modern settings of the Wembley production, *City of Song*.

The film was not too well received by the "intelligentsia," possibly because of its direct public appeal. In my opinion it was the most outstanding piece of imaginative screen work, *produced with due regard to commercial requirements*, presented up to that date. Maybe it savoured too greatly of Communistic propaganda for many, for it portrayed a vision of the city of the future, in which the workers were reduced to machines, all looking extremely depressed, enslaved by unalterable systems which were invented and controlled by a handful of wealthy, frowning magnates. And yet the consoling moral of the film should have pleased any one who was unduly disturbed by this uncomfortable prophecy of our future, for blazoned across the screen were the words, "The mediator between brain and muscle must be the heart." At least, it had to be in the English version, which was completely ruined by the happy ending so unhappily added. However,

apart from any dislike of the theme, *Metropolis* was a marvellous piece of screen-craft. Firstly, the settings were wonderful—and, most important of all in planning something which is purely imaginative, they were consistent with each other, and apparently practical. The comprehensive long shots of *Metropolis*, showing gigantic skyscrapers, encircled by curious flying "trams," were exceptional examples of model photography.

And the handling of the workers—grim, black-costumed hordes, remembered by their perfect movements, slow, regular, clockwork-limbed wretches, toiling far below the surface of the earth—here symbolism was cleverly introduced, for employers sat in palatial offices, relaxed in vast sports grounds, and their children frolicked and flirted in private gardens surpassing Kew in splendour and size, whilst the workers toiled in another sphere of steel and darkness. Machinery was the God of *Metropolis*, machinery so colossal, so intricate, that it was an eternal nightmare to those who had invented it. The extraordinary incident of bringing the Robot to life, played by Brigitte Helm, was handled in brilliant fashion—the scientist's laboratory and his electrical instruments creating a thrilling, if somewhat theatrical, effect. Throughout, the uncanny atmosphere, the people, the surroundings, all were dissociated from the world we know. The fervour of the mob and the dramatic flood were scenes to be remembered. I am told that the original German version ended logically, with no suggestion of happiness in the closing scenes. These, however, for reasons not apparent to me as a spectator, were altered to enable Brain and Muscle, otherwise Employer

and Worker, to shake hands, and every one beamed as the film faded out. This absurd sequence was preceded by a pantomimic chase along the tops of high buildings.

And thus the stupendous efforts which had held one for so long were more or less wasted. Whether this alteration was made to ensure the film being marketable in this country I know not, but it is a poor compliment to British audiences to imagine they would be unable to enjoy this impressive film unless it tasted sweet at the end. As a matter of fact, *Metropolis* struck me as being outstanding by offering both a subject that was serious and imaginative, and great entertainment. I do not think it was an example of pure cinematic art, nor that it was intended to please minority audiences. On the contrary, I imagine it was made purely for the masses. Nevertheless, the man who can conceive so vast a subject, and treat it so ably, is a person who understands a very great deal about the potentialities of the Film. *He sees it as a medium for expressing dreams.* As he later produced *The Girl in the Moon*, an effort that challenges Jules Verne and H. G. Wells combined, one assumes that Fritz Lang considers the Film to be the right vehicle for portraying everything *but* the actual. Is he far wrong?

The presentation of *Metropolis* leads me to discuss the question of showmanship, and what I am about to say concerning the treatment of *Metropolis* is, unfortunately, applicable to the exploitation of many films.

I saw *Metropolis* in London, where one would expect to find films presented to the best possible advantage. This is what I witnessed: first and last, a lady's hat (the size being regrettably larger than the gnomish helmets

of 1931), for the seats had been placed so that every patron had a clear view of the person in front. Secondly, the programme, being continuous, was racing through when I arrived, and I found myself striving to understand the sorrows of a diminutive man accompanied by a gigantic woman, both seated in a car which kicked up its back wheels in mule fashion. I am not denying that this comedy was amusing, nor am I attempting to adopt a supercilious attitude towards the programme. Merely am I leading up to what, in my opinion, is a complete lack of understanding of the art of showmanship which exists not only in this country, but in America. After the comedy, we saw a news-reel, and as the operator was apparently late on his time-schedule, it was projected so rapidly that the screen action was reduced, or rather *increased* to absurdity. The inevitable horse race concluded the news-reel, and almost *before* it had been jerked off the screen, the introductory titles of *Metropolis* faded in.

Let me add that the news-reel had been accompanied by the organ alone, the other instrumentalists having rested during the miscellaneous portion of the programme, in order that they might return refreshed for the "Feature." Despite a cinema organ's ability to register syn-copated music with as much feeling as it booms forth sonorous sonatas, it is not quite the most suitable instrument with which to accompany a horse race. Anyhow, the orchestra did not return in time to play for the opening of *Metropolis*, and so the faithful organ, ready in any emergency, continued *without a break*, to accompany the "big" picture.

Now the opening titles of *Metropolis* were unusually impressive, several dissolving one into another, as striking passages explained the theme of the film, offering a brief, rather well-written sermon. Each of these titles was superimposed over gleaming machinery which constantly changed—giant arms of steel moving rhythmically, first in one direction, then in another, creating the desired atmosphere, which, under the circumstances, certainly needed a lot of “persuading.” As the titles ended and the picture faded in, the orchestra arrived, *tuned up*, and began to play—another jar. The effect of all this was disastrous, in so far as heralding in *Metropolis* was concerned.

Small consolation though it may be, the reasons for such slapdash methods may be found to hand. Firstly, the continuous performance is responsible for a great deal of the trouble, and cannot but place the cinema on a lower level than the legitimate theatre. From a commercial point of view, it is perfectly understandable why suburban cinemas have continuous programmes, but in the West End it ought not to be too much to expect that films should be presented with the utmost ingenuity and feeling possible. Had I been exhibiting *Metropolis*, I should have presented it by itself at definite times, preceding it with a suitable orchestral overture. Frequently I have been informed that the public would not be satisfied with only the “Feature”—that they would feel they were not obtaining their money’s worth. Unfortunately, this is only too true, but does not the blame rest with the cinema for such a state of affairs? There are one or two isolated halls which run separate sessions, so that

the audience is seated before the programme begins (with the exception, of course, of those to whom punctuality is bad form). And in these halls there is less hurry on the part of the projectionists, no confusion caused by a constant stream of people going in and coming out, and no overlapping of the news-reel on to the beginning of the "Feature." But with a few exceptions, one rarely sees a production staged by itself, and presented with as much consideration as a stage play, thus safeguarding people who pay to see a particular production from being confronted with irrelevant films for an hour beforehand, a condition which completely spoils the chances of the big picture appearing in an atmosphere consistent with its appeal.

This is one of the most important points concerning the Film, for after all the time, money, and brains expended on producing an important picture, its makers generally appear to forget it when it reaches the public. Rarely have producers or renters any idea how their product is being presented, whether it is being misrepresented (as it so often is on the posters) or, in the case of a silent film, what musical accompaniment it has been given. As a matter of fact, a company's interest in its production may be said to cease when it has been booked, and just what happens to it no one cares. And yet the period demanding most serious attention is when a production actually reaches the public.

In this respect, the trade show offers, or should offer, an example of how a film ought to be shown. In "silent" days, a film to be trade-shown was always studied by the Musical Director, who would score music

specially for the trade screening, and the result was that the film was helped to an extraordinary degree. That same film, when released, and accompanied in mechanical fashion, would lose a considerable amount of its appeal.

I used *Metropolis* as an example because it struck me how little the exhibitor could have understood the discord created by bundling on so unusual a film without breathing space, after a hectic news-reel.

The cinema truly boasts that it offers more for less money than the theatre, but such a policy can be carried too far where important productions are concerned. Had *Metropolis* been a play, one would have expected to see it by itself and would have been more or less attuned to the character of the drama.

In this respect it will be excusable if I cite yet another example of a similar nature, offering perhaps an even more vivid illustration of bad showmanship. Quite recently I went to a particular theatre to see a Nature film. It was of the type which attracts the kind of people who rarely visit cinemas. It was not a continuous performance, but before the Nature film appeared, we sat through *one hour and three-quarters* of the most impossible films imaginable—presenting vulgar comedians whose rightful place was in the kind of music-hall which has perished, a coarse comedy, and, of course, a news-reel showing numbers of people laying foundation stones in little-known countries. At last came the Nature film, *and by that time many people had left the hall.*

Efforts certainly have been made recently at staging prologues prior to the "Features," but the continuous performance will never permit the Film to create the

maximum amount of atmosphere required to establish it on a serious dramatic basis. That atmosphere, everything else apart, can never be produced in halls where audiences are for ever passing in and out.

In regard to the question of music, it is only of recent years, since the arrival of "canned music," that people have realized what a great part it plays, or played, in the cinema. Previously, it had been taken for granted, becoming conspicuous only by its absence. But music is an essential part of the Film, and has been mainly responsible for the emotional appeal which has made the cinema so popular. One realizes this when viewing productions in the small private theatres which all film companies possess. These miniature cinemas, often sumptuously furnished, show pictures varying from about four feet to twenty, but (and I am referring only to silent films) there is no musical accompaniment. This is known as "seeing films cold"—and it certainly is! Imagine a cinema screen reduced by half, and a feature film being shown to an audience of, perhaps, six—and six of the hardest, most blasé people alive. The only accompaniment is an occasional grunt, and frequent oaths—rarely a laugh. To sit through such shows is to realize the importance of music. But I would infinitely prefer to see a film "cold" than accompanied by unsuitable music.

Generally speaking, films have come to be accepted by the public, regardless of how they are shown. Years of unimaginative showmanship have created indifference in audiences, who are ignorant of the appeal films could possess if shown to the best advantage. If the "Feature" attracts them, the rest is just watched. It may happen

that the "Shorts" are of more genuine interest than the "Feature," but it seems to be length that counts with audiences. Just how true this is will be realized by the name given to short films—for they are called "Fill-ups." And they are treated as such, being shown if time permits, and left on the shelf if it does not.

By this method every type of film is, actually, suffocated by every other kind. A riotous comedy makes a devastating prologue to a serious "Feature," and, as I have illustrated, a hustling news-reel creates quite the wrong atmosphere with which to herald an imaginative production. Mixtures have their advantages, and certainly appear to appease the appetite of the public, but I believe that most people would feel quite satisfied if they visited a cinema and were treated to an outstanding film, shown at *definite* times, and preceded by suitable music from a good orchestra—instead of from an acrobatic one in which coloured spotlights pick out instrumentalists, and an organ soloist rises out of the depths, plays a syncopated version of *Poet and Peasant*, and magically descends again!

I recall seeing, at the London Hippodrome, that masterly German film, *The Wonderful Lie*, for which an augmented orchestra had been specially assembled, and the music selected by someone who knew his job. The result was a joy to see and listen to. The hypnotic power of music over all types of people has never, perhaps, been felt so vividly as in the cinema, of which it is an integral part.

The extraordinary popularity of the film—the *silent* film—can therefore be attributed to the appeal made to

the senses; firstly, what the eye sees, and secondly, what the ear hears, and, until the birth of Talking films, the ear heard music instead of the human voice, making drama not only far easier to understand, but infinitely more appealing to the emotions.

The mention of emotional appeal brings me to the Soviet film. Such violent opinions are held about Russian productions that it is perhaps necessary for me to explain that I am concerned here solely with films, and not with politics. We must admit that it is not particularly easy to dissociate a Soviet film from the spirited propaganda it contains, but we can do our best. Therefore, may I repeat that I am not here interested in the success or failure of the Five-Year Plan, but that I *am* extremely concerned with the future of the Russian film, for I have no hesitation in stating that several productions from that revolutionary country have proved to be the greatest contributions so far made to the screen.

It is only to be expected that such films should be misrepresented, and in view of the fact that they contain so great an amount of undiluted propaganda, it is hardly possible for the ordinary picture-goer to see them without receiving something in the nature of shock. One of the chief reasons why they are regarded with so much suspicion and are followed by the "highbrow" contingent is, presumably, because they have been banned. A cynical producer once remarked to me that some directors have to wait years before they can get a film banned, whereas Russia suddenly begins to make films and achieves success immediately! However, not all Russian films are

worthy of the blind praise so many people bestow on them.

The fundamental difference between the Russian film and every other is that the cinema is universally accepted for entertainment purposes only, *except by Russia*, who regards it primarily as the greatest and most powerful medium through which to influence her own people, and spread her propaganda throughout the world. We cannot, therefore, judge her films by the standards we set for the productions of other nations. The Russian film has the Soviet Government behind it—it is State-controlled, and its productions record, in vivid dramatic form, the principles of that Government, the history of the Revolution, and the intensity of the Soviet mind. Russia is utilizing her films to educate her people, and they are circulated throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Among Russia's greatest producers are Eisenstein and Pudovkin, the former having made *The Battleship Potemkin* and *October*—and the latter *The End of St. Petersburg* and *Mother*. It may be said in all seriousness that in those pictures, apart from the question of subject-matter, there is more understanding of the Film than in the entire output of the rest of the world. The original title of *October* was *Ten Days that Shook the World*, and it shook those who saw it so violently that immediate steps were taken in this country to prohibit its public exhibition.

It is hardly conceivable that Russia and Hollywood are working with the same basic materials—film and camera—so fundamentally different are the results. Russian producers set the finest example of screencraft

so far devised. They *discovered* the art of editing, because, *in the first instance, they approached the cinema as an art.* Naturally, the colossal resources placed at the disposal of Russian producers have resulted in mighty productions, gigantic in conception, and not merely "spectacle." But all the resources in the world could not have given them the knowledge they have gained by hard study and the application of creative minds to something which, they knew, was *a new and limitless medium of expression*, more potent than literature, and more powerful and far-reaching than any other form of dramatic art.

Up to the present, Russian films (with one or two exceptions) have been silent, and they lose nothing by the absence of voice and sound, so remarkable is the method of narration. Indeed, they have retained their international appeal by their silence rather than otherwise, since the Russian language has not yet been universally adopted! In *The End of St. Petersburg* Pudovkin achieves by what are, after all, extremely simple means, a satire on war which has never been equalled by all the extravagant war productions America has offered. By "cross-cutting" (which I shall discuss in a later chapter) a dramatic effect is obtained which is so incisive, so "cutting," as it were, in the non-technical sense of the word, that it almost provokes laughter. Vivid shots of soldiers in the firing line are shown alternately with pictures of excited financiers in the City, of hysterical women and iron-jawed militarists. One after another, contrasting scenes flit before us—cause and effect, cause and effect, endlessly, relentlessly, until the message is driven into the heads of the densest: the abject misery and poverty

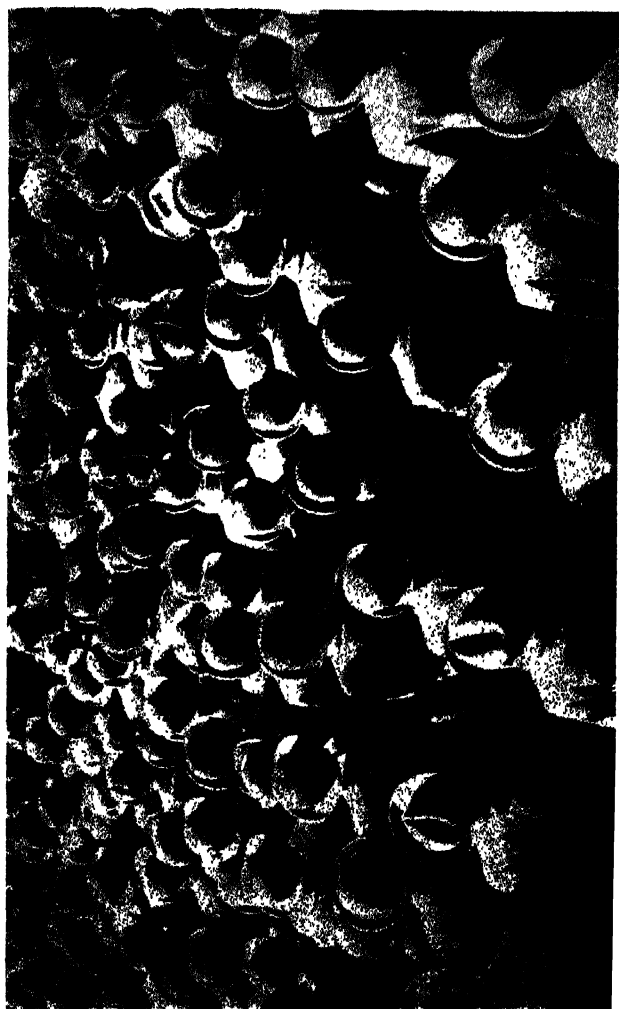


PLATE III
The End of St. Petersburg

of peasants forced to seek work in prison-like cities—fields compared with ugly buildings—human figures dwarfed to pigmies by colossal skyscrapers.

In Pudovkin's own words, in an address he gave to the Film Society in London; "When faced with the task of presenting a captain of industry in the film *The End of St. Petersburg*, I sought to solve the problem¹ by cutting in his figure with the equestrian statue of Peter the Great. I claim that the resultant composition is effective with a reality quite other than that produced by the posing of the actor, which nearly always smacks of the theatre."

In those words, the Russian approach to the Film is made clear. The art of editing is the basis of Russia's film production, *raw* material supplying the subject-matter. The directors find their actors in the fields and streets, and their "sets" are ready made for them. They prefer the actual to the artificial.

The results have proved unusually successful from an artistic point of view. No film star has ever registered such convincing emotions as the Russian peasant, selected from hordes living just the life which it has been the intention of the Soviet Government to magnify on the screen. *Mother*, Pudovkin's second and finer film, contained further examples of brilliant cutting. One vivid sequence which I remember, and which, incidentally, he singles out himself for exemplification of his methods, was the way in which he established the joy of a youth

¹ By showing quick alternate shots of first the captain of industry and then the statue, the desired symbolism is created, in simple and vivid fashion. Emphasis is given by always following a shot of the industrialist by one of the statue, throughout the film.



PLATE IV

A TYPICAL RUSSIAN SCREEN CHARACTER IN *The General Line*
Atlas

in prison who learns he is to be set free on the morrow. Instead of merely showing the prisoner, in his cell, registering intense delight, he begins by showing a huge close-up of the boy's mouth, the corners lifting in a smile. And, alternately with this, he *cuts in* pictures of bubbling brooks, birds playing, children laughing, sunshine—pictorial flashes symbolic of freedom. That is essentially film art: no other medium is capable of such methods of vivid expression.

Yet, by offering isolated examples of Russian film art, we cannot blind ourselves to the fact that such genius is being used entirely for the purpose of expressing the messages which the Soviet Government wishes to convey to its subjects (and also to the rest of the world). These directors have been unable to produce films free of propaganda, but should they ever be given the opportunity, the results will be vital to the future of the Film. Luckily, genius cannot be suppressed, even though its nationalized creations may be.

The reaction to Russian films in this country is curious. As already stated, a minority is loud in its praise, but the average cinema-goer is ignorant of the existence of the Soviet film. Personally, I find myself just as indifferent to the evil influence of Russian propaganda as I am to American, German, French, or British propaganda. I am unable to see the difference between, say, those British or American films which contain propaganda for the perpetuation of the war-mind, and Russian films containing propaganda for the destruction of it (but, alas, apparently superseding it by a similar impulse in a new guise). It is really a question of recognizing propaganda

as something which serves two ends—to perpetuate things as they are, which, of course, is not recognized as propaganda—and to alter existing conditions. In the former respect we can hardly claim to be innocent of a desire to propagate British national beliefs ourselves. Nevertheless, the onesidedness of the Russian outlook to people totally ignorant of conditions in Russia is an attitude which cannot result in anything but the prohibition of Russian films. And yet, to stress the supreme art of the Russian film, I would claim that there is not a person living who would not be deeply affected by the brilliant denunciation of war in *The End of St. Petersburg*, nor who would disagree with the spirited protest of the producer. The particular sequences devoted to this satire could be cut out of the film and shown alone, and every nation in the world would understand the message. Such international appeal spells ultimate success for the Film, irrespective of its country of origin. It is significant that Russian films have received no adverse criticism for their production qualities, being banned solely on account of subject-matter. But it is to be feared that it will be a long time before Russian films are entirely free of material regarded by the world as pernicious, and even longer before they will be publicly released in England, for one feels that even a film containing no propaganda would not be welcomed from Russia, in view of the prejudice her first efforts have aroused, prejudice so violent that one may even wonder that Tchekov's plays are still permitted on the stage, and Dostoievski's novels in libraries.

· If I were to make a personal confession I should own that I have witnessed many films which have *not* come

from Russia, which in my view definitely do more harm to the public mind than all the Russian films strung together. I fear, however, I am almost alone in thinking this, and so I will pass on judiciously to a question of vital interest to Great Britain—the encouraging of British pictures, rather than lamenting too emphatically the discouraging of Russian ones.

British films! Even to-day people are constantly asking where they are—why there are so few of them—and some actually say they prefer American ones. British pictures, however, are quickly establishing themselves. They are being produced in increasing quantities, and, taking into consideration the extreme difficulties they have had to face, they are now doing remarkably well.

The British film industry experienced hard times after the War, and no signs of improvement were apparent for some years. The American stranglehold was visibly tightening, and several British companies, unable to finance productions which would reach the standard of those from America, closed their studios. Furthermore, as British films became scarcer, American films increased in number, reigning supreme, and ultimately a crisis threatened. English producers could find no work, and several went to America. With few exceptions, however, they returned poorer than they went. The years 1925-27 were amongst the worst known, and then, as a result of long agitation, the Government took up the problem. The seriousness of the position both from a commercial and a national point of view dawned on those in authority, and the question of how to put the British film industry on its feet was given lengthy consideration.

The result was the Cinematograph Films Act, 1927, which incorporated provisions for securing a quota for British films. The Quota in relation to Renters came into operation on 1st April, 1928, and will continue until 31st March, 1938. Briefly, it compels Renters to include a certain percentage of British films in their outputs, such percentage increasing annually. During the first year, ending on 31st March, 1929, every Renter was compelled to include $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent of British films; in 1930 the quota was raised to 10 per cent, which was not increased for 1931, but is being raised to $12\frac{1}{2}$ per cent for 1932. By 1936, it will have reached 20 per cent, which will remain until the Act expires in 1938. Similarly, of course, the exhibitors have their quota, which compels them to *show* a percentage of British films during the same years. This began in 1929 with 5 per cent, was increased to $7\frac{1}{2}$ per cent by 1930, remained unaltered throughout 1931, and is being raised to 10 per cent in 1932, $12\frac{1}{2}$ in 1933, 15 in 1934-5, and 20 per cent for 1936-8.

The question which now raises itself is: What constitutes a British film? Is it British if produced by Britons abroad, or is it American if made here with British actors paid with American capital and produced by a German? This was the kind of problem which confronted the Board of Trade, and the following requirements were drawn up for a film which is to be deemed British—

1. It must have been made by a person who was at the time the film was made a British subject, or by two or more persons each of whom was a British subject, or by a British company.
2. After the thirty-first day of December, nineteen hundred

and twenty-eight, the studio scenes must have been photographed in a studio in the British Empire.

3. The author of the scenario must have been a British subject at the time the film was made.

4. Not less than seventy-five per cent of the salaries, wages, and payments specifically paid for labour and services in the making of the film (exclusive of payments in respect of copyright and of the salary or payments to one foreign actor or actress or producer, but inclusive of the payments to the author of the scenario) must have been paid to British subjects or persons domiciled in the British Empire, but it shall be lawful for the Board of Trade to relax this requirement in any case where they are satisfied that the maker has taken all reasonable steps to secure compliance with the requirement, and that his failure to comply therewith was occasioned by exceptional circumstances beyond his control, but so that such power of relaxation shall not permit of the percentage aforesaid being less than seventy per cent.

Certain types of films, however, irrespective of length, do not qualify for registration under the Act, and, therefore, do not count to either renter or exhibitor as quota subjects. Such films are not, therefore, sought with eagerness, as sufficient difficulty has already been experienced in obtaining the required quota footage, without increasing outputs by British pictures which will not help renters and exhibitors to fulfil their duties. Exceptions to which the Act does not apply are—

- (a) Films depicting wholly or mainly news and current events.
- (b) Films depicting wholly or mainly natural scenery.
- (c) Films being wholly or mainly commercial advertisements.
- (d) Films used wholly or mainly by educational institutions for educational purposes.
- (e) Films depicting wholly or mainly industrial or manufacturing processes.
- (f) Scientific films, including natural history films.

Without doubt, the quota was a godsend to the

British film industry; it came in time to avert a catastrophe, and it put production on its feet. Studios took on new leases of life, more were speedily erected, and every one began to produce—for a *guaranteed market*. The Act was generous; it made no stipulations whatever as to the character of the films to be produced. No suggestion of nationalism crept into the clauses. Producing companies were free to make British films out of whatever material they chose.

There are, however, two attitudes towards the quota. On the one hand, producing concerns are delighted with the fact that their films *must* be accepted by renters and booked by exhibitors; and on the other, there are the exhibitors, some of whom complain that they are being compelled to show British films because they are British, whether they are good or bad films. In fairness to these people it must be pointed out that irrespective of the quota, they have always been willing to show and boost British pictures, *when their quality* has justified it.

In addition to these factors there are the American Companies with renting organizations in this country, and the position in which the quota has placed them. Such firms had previously existed entirely on the receipts from renting their own American productions. What were they to do? They had to include the agreed percentage of British pictures in their annual outputs. They did so! They produce "quota pictures," in some instances as cheaply as they possibly can, caring little so long as the footage counts in their favour. This practice naturally increased as time went on and the required percentage became greater. "Quota pictures"

were and are being made everywhere—and although it would be untrue to say that their quality is below standard, it can be easily realized that the same pains are not always taken, nor such great sums expended, on these productions, for which a market is waiting. That is the natural result of an Act made to establish the British film industry, which also applies to the American film industry in England.

Before the Act, America dominated the screens of the world, and naturally her great output necessitated considerable British production to form even the proportion of quota reels; to make this up American renting companies supplement their British "quota pictures" with miscellaneous films, bought from various independent English producers, a number being of a quality that would have resulted in their rejection before the Act.

From a purely artistic point of view, the Quota is doubtless regarded with some disfavour by those demanding spontaneous expression, and art for art's sake. But neither the industry nor the film-going public could exist on such an attitude. It was not the fault of Great Britain that she was being throttled by Hollywood, and although it would have been distinctly more encouraging had she been able to establish her productions throughout the world without such a measure as the quota, one can but trust that no mean advantage will be taken of the fact that a guaranteed market awaits every British picture produced. It was inevitable that there should be people ready to leap at the opportunity of making "quota pictures" as cheaply, quickly, and indifferently as possible, but in the main, as is being proved, the general

effect of the Act has been to stabilize the industry and start the production ball rolling, the momentum of which has increased annually ever since, and by the time the Act expires it is hoped it will be spinning round independently. Nevertheless, it will be only those British productions which would have been booked gladly by exhibitors on their merits, even if the quota had never been born, which will carry British films forward. "Quota pictures" made for the quota, and booked because of the quota, can only bring their quota of bad business in the long run.

The quota was introduced at a time when the British film industry was very unsound: it will expire in 1938, when the British film should be *Sound* in every sense of that important word.

And remembering that there may be such a thing as "unsound" sound, it will now be interesting to follow the course of the Sound Film.

CHAPTER III

THE BIRTH OF A NOTION

SILENCE no longer golden—Is sound unsound?—Language problems—Hollywood ahead

THE year 1927 dissolved into 1928, and although film production was humming with activity, films were not as yet Talking!

As a result of the quota every British studio was a hive of industry. New equipment was being installed, ambitious production schedules planned, and long-suffering screen artists were finding it comparatively easy to secure work. Elstree, "England's Hollywood," became prominent. British International Pictures extended their floor space; a mass of girders next to the railway station quickly formed themselves into the skeleton of another studio, and several other companies were soon turning out silent British pictures faster than ever before. America's flood did not cease, and the work of European studios was well represented on the world's screens. Everyone was as happy as it was possible to be in the film world, and the most miserable pessimists had to admit that the turning point for British films had been reached, and success had come at last. There was absolutely no doubt whatever about it, and so, with good financial backing, obtained on the security offered by the quota, British production went ahead, and more and more equipment—lights, cameras, studios—was purchased.

And then America dropped a most disconcerting sort of bomb, the explosion of which echoed on screens all over the United Kingdom, for without any apparent warning she confronted us with glaring advance publicity about Talking Pictures. Naturally, we laughed. A little later we merely smiled, and ultimately, we frowned. Talking Pictures arrived. We heard them, and immediately disliked them. The public would never tolerate them. The voices were muffled. Nothing more than a novelty, an American stunt! Nevertheless, more talking pictures came over. Meanwhile, British silent production progressed, ignoring the noisy exportations from Hollywood. In any case, they would not materially affect British production activities, and so further arrangements were planned well ahead.

Several important theatres in London became "wired" for talking pictures, and included one, now and then, in a silent programme. The public began to talk, too. Every one was talking. The result was a terrible din. British studios continued to make silent films, though those responsible had ceased to look happy when thinking of the future.

I trust that the tragedy pending is quite clear to you, and the pathetic position of British films as vividly apparent as it was to those at work in the studios. Remember how, before the War, British films had forged ahead, and how, from 1914-1918, they were at a standstill. Recall, too, that with characteristic courage, they began all over again after the Armistice, at first successfully, but, as the years passed, with less and less chance of standing up to the American invasion, until ultimately,

they were practically at a standstill once again. And then the quota enabled them to start, this time, in earnest, with greater chances of success than ever before. Take into consideration the enormous sums spent in equipping British studios with the very latest equipment, for the production of *silent* films. And then imagine how they felt when, imperceptibly, at first, but with ever-increasing rapidity, American talking pictures swept aside the silent films, and established themselves in the theatres of Great Britain.

Even these circumstances, however, were not cause for genuine alarm, for there was no reason at this stage to suppose that silent films would be killed by talking pictures, especially in view of the general opinion, held by the public and the industry alike, that the few "Talkies" which had arrived were nothing but a novelty, made by America in reviving a supposedly waning interest in the cinema in general. The novelty would wear off, "just as roller-skating had done," as one visionary remarked to me.

Therefore, intense curiosity was more general than anxiety, and as American silent pictures were still rolling in, there seemed little cause for further discussion. But those American silent films *were the last of their kind made in Hollywood*, and Britain then realized that Hollywood was making *only Sound films*, which meant, of course, that in future they would dominate the market. It may be said that this need not have affected the British film industry, and that it is absurd to think America could do exactly as she liked, without consulting our wishes on the matter, nor considering the requirements of our

public. That is perfectly true, yet, curiously enough, America did do more or less as she wished with our screens, and it is not so great a miracle after all when one remembers that American films practically keep our cinemas open, and that without them almost the entire industry would be no more, save for the outputs of British studios, which at this particular period were certainly not large enough to supply everybody. Naturally, America knowing her power, and our limitations, made her dramatic move just at the right moment, which was, of course, the wrong moment for us. She had wisely refrained from publicizing her experiments with talking pictures, preferring to wait until they were in a sufficiently practical form to present suddenly. She knew British silent film production was on the upward path; she knew the trouble taken and money spent on studios—and she knew our films were improving daily. She knew, too, that her first talking productions would be met with criticism, but that by a combination of showmanship, enormous publicity, ever-increasing technical efficiency and weight of numbers, she would make us *like them* in the near future. She succeeded.

But what of British studios, and of British silent films? Having waited long enough to see whether the public would or would not like talking films, they discovered that, despite a large number of people definitely preferring silent ones, a still larger number preferred the new "Talkies." Whether they liked them because they were a novelty or not, was unknown, but it was found that silent films fell flat after a big "100 per cent All Talking, All Singing, All Dancing" spectacle.

Some in the British industry clung to the hope that the invasion was but a passing craze, but level-headed men realized that talking pictures *had come to stay*, words which flitted up and down Wardour Street in a most aggravating fashion, until mouthed automatically by every unthinking person in the industry. "Talking Pictures have come to stay!"

The result? British studios were once again in a sorry plight. All schedules for productions, save those actually in hand, were cancelled. The whole future was altered. Studios were empty. Large numbers of people became unemployed.

But British studios are unique. They can face all the attacks America launches, and survive. And so once again, efforts were made to recommence, and *British studios were equipped for making talking pictures*. Naturally, this took a considerable time, during which America was busily engaged in establishing her new form of entertainment on our screens. Consequently she had reached a high standard of technical excellence by the time we were ready to begin making our first Sound films. But we persevered, and the results are apparent to all to-day.

That is the story of the coming of the talking picture to Great Britain. It is hard to realize the revolution it created in filmdom, for the technical problems attached to converting a nation's studios from Silent to Sound production are immense. Despite all difficulties, however, it was done.

But the story of the arrival of talking films in Great Britain is altogether different from the story of the

arrival of talking films. This holds a real surprise, for, despite the fact that numbers of people are under the impression that they were invented only when America hurled them at us recently, they are *as old as the Moving Picture itself*. Briefly, their history is as follows—

The name of Edison looms large again, for nearly ten years prior to the public appearance of his Kinetoscope he was concentrating on combining the phonograph, with which his name will always be primarily associated, with the moving image. Let us not accept the present wonder of the talking picture as something which was inevitable with the progress of time, for in doing so we shall be inclined to underestimate, if not altogether ignore, the powers of men like Edison. The magic of reproducing the human voice phonographically was equalled only by the original conception of the desire to do so. Similarly, to create moving images was a magical idea. But to be so ambitious as to endeavour to combine both, thereby creating a complete mechanical representation of Life, was unparalleled. Yet Edison was determined to achieve this result, for having evolved a primitive method of making pictures move before the eye, he was conscious that something was lacking—sound, voices, music! Only the perfect synchronization of both image and sound would create the perfect illusion, or should we now substitute for the word illusion—reality?

The result of his work was to combine his Kinetoscope with his Phonograph, the combination being known as the Kinephone. It will be remembered that the Kinetoscope permitted only one person to view the pictures at a time, and so the strains of the Phonograph, that is,

music, were heard by means of the old-fashioned tubes which fitted into the ears of that lonely spectator. A combination of sight and sound was definitely achieved, but the two did not synchronize. And for years after, despite continuous experiments, all practically on the same lines, synchronization remained as far off as ever.

It would still be a distant dream to-day, had not the problem been approached from a fundamentally different angle. By this I mean that the early experimenters were endeavouring to perfect a method which was and will always be practically impossible, that is, the synchronizing of two different mediums *emanating from separate sources*.

This fact can be very easily illustrated in the home. If, for instance, you ask your companion to memorize or read a short sentence which you will mouth at the same time, you will find he has extreme difficulty in making those words synchronize with your lip movements, simply because there is no single governing link controlling both.

And so, despite the amazing ingenuity of both the Phonograph and the Kinetoscope, they remained wonders apart, refusing to merge one into the other.

It was only when, many years later, experiments were begun on entirely new lines, that success drew near. Up till then, Sound had been reproduced PHONOGRAPHICALLY, but the new idea was to reproduce or record it PHOTOGRAPHICALLY.

One immediately realizes the advantage of this latter method, for it means that both image and sound would

emanate from and be projected by a single instrument, both mediums being interrelated, and in synchronization. The quality of the sound might not be good, and the photography of the images indifferent, but both would be exactly together.

America proceeded along these lines, her experiments costing enormous sums of money. Year after year she toiled, but not alone. Similar experiments were being carried out in Great Britain, France, and Germany. It was America, however, with her vast resources, unbounding enthusiasm and cosmopolitan collection of brains, which ultimately created a system of synchronization perfect enough to present in public. Mention must here be made and credit given to Fox Movietone as being the first vivid example of a commercial talking picture. This was shown in 1927 in America, and proved to be the overture to the sound picture of to-day.

From 1927 onwards, silence was certainly no longer golden from the box-office point of view, and the moving picture, which was so often referred to as being in its infancy, quickly learnt to talk. Like most infants, it became noisy, and made little attempt either to pronounce its words properly, or to make itself understandable to its listeners. Nevertheless, it was most voluble. It had learnt how to talk and it was determined to do so continuously, whether it had anything to say or not.

I intend describing in a later chapter the actual methods by which the modern talking film is produced, and confine my remarks here to the subject of the application of sound to the moving image, irrespective of the quality of that sound.

Prior to the arrival of talkies, producers shouted the advantages of the silent film over all other forms of expression, saying it was complete in itself and required only music to increase its appeal. When sound came, the same producers welcomed it, declaring it made the Film complete, and proceeded to make Talkies without pausing to consider just how sound could best be used in conjunction with the Film. Briefly, they now possessed power to make their films speak, and it was their job to exercise this power immediately. The demand had been brilliantly created, and the supply would have to be forthcoming without any shadow of doubt. It was.

Now, instead of following in the footsteps of the average renter, producer, and exhibitor, excellent men though they are, let us begin all over again, assuming that we are creators of silent films, and that someone has kindly equipped our studio with sound-reproducing apparatus of the very best type. Just what is our reaction?

Previously, we had successfully expressed our drama by means of a series of moving images, accompanied by music, to stimulate the emotions and increase the general appeal. Now we are able to add speech, and in doing so, we shall be asking a great deal more from our audience. We shall, in fact, be demanding almost too much, for both eyes and ears will be combining in an effort to understand our production. We must not confuse the work of the ear in its reception of music, and of voice. In a cinema the former is subconscious reception, the latter most definitely conscious.

It may be thought that talking pictures, no less than

actual stage plays, have proved that eye and ear work admirably together, and are perfectly capable of responding to a film containing audible speech. But we must bear in mind that the eye works much more quickly than the ear, and that a talking film is or should be very different from a stage play. The eye can almost instantaneously record a picture seen, whereas the ear is much slower.

As distinct from the legitimate stage, the cinema has shown that pictures of every description, diagrams, cartoons—in fact, any illustrations appealing to the eye—form the most vivid medium of expression, capable of presenting drama more powerfully and with greater emphasis, to most people, than the spoken word. Impressions of pictures seen—providing, of course, they are presented as they should be—remain on the mind for indefinite periods, frequently for ever, whereas spoken words are quickly forgotten by most people. I can still remember in detail, for instance, scenes in films I saw many years ago. In *Atlantis*, the unusual picture of the lost continent which was shown at the Covent Garden Opera House, I recall the settings, the weird boudoir of the queen in the heart of the desert, the shadowy arches of the buildings. I remember, without effort, the giant spirit-figure of Wyndham Standing striding about in *Earth-bound*, and the magnificent church setting; and Nazimova in *Salome*, the film of amazing scenes, Beardsley in design, and Hollywood in execution, especially in the execution of St. John! And, of course, I remember almost every sequence in *Drifters*, John Grierson's great little epic. (This film I have refrained from mentioning in detail so

far, even though it is a silent film, as I intend introducing it into the chapter devoted to the art of Cutting.)

I could add to the above many films seen years ago, vivid memories of which remain clearly in my mind, and, I am sure, in the minds of most people who have seen them. Yet I cannot truthfully say that I remember so vividly details of more recent dialogue films I have seen. If I look up records of them, or chance to see a title on a hoarding, I can recall the contents, but only when so *brought to my notice*—a very different thing from remembering, *instantly*, films viewed between seven and ten years ago. These facts lead me to believe, personally, that the visual appeal is the more important, and the power of speech secondary, in so far as the cinema is concerned.

But the dialogue film of to-day is attempting something it can hardly be expected to achieve—for it is offering simultaneously two mediums, which, instead of increasing the dramatic power of each other, thereby producing a far greater emotional appeal, are actually struggling with each other for supremacy, and, incidentally, making two distinct demands on an audience which is compelled to concentrate, to an uncomfortable degree, to extract the maximum of enjoyment from the production before it.

Despite this fact, I would be the first to admit that the modern dialogue film is attractive, entertaining, and everything it should be to make its production commercially worth while, but it is definitely not true Cinema. It is the film of the moment, but it is pulling up rather than laying down the foundations of the cinema of the

future. Every day it is edging nearer and nearer to the legitimate stage, whereas it should keep as far away from it as it possibly can—for *its own ultimate good*.

Why then does the public appear to prefer the dialogue film to the silent one? Maybe because it has no alternative! And there are other reasons.

Firstly, in view of the fact that it is a distinct novelty; secondly, because it offers spectacle superior to that of the stage, cheaper and infinitely more accessible; thirdly, because *nothing is missing*—for voice, music, and picture are all given in for the same money; and fourthly, because it is not the practice, nor even the duty, of the public to search the recesses of its mind to analyse its reaction to the dialogue film, and to evolve alternative methods of screen expression which would be truer to the medium. If people are presented with dialogue films day after day, they become both used to them and fond of them, but they cannot be expected to demand other methods of production which they have neither seen nor heard of. Naturally, in writing this, I am concerned with the Film as an independent Art—a medium of expression entirely separate from every other form, and, in this connection I would point out again that a film must be a single united whole if it is to create the greatest emotional response possible in an audience, and to justify its appearance. Is it not significant that a film such as *The End of St. Petersburg* is, *without doubt*, capable of gripping an audience to a far greater extent than any dialogue film? It is silent in every sense of the word, gaining by its silence.

And now we arrive at another important point. The

power of the Film lies in its construction, that is, in the editing of it. At this stage we can refer to a film as being a series of strips of celluloid, capable of creating drama by the order in which they are shown on the screen. The strips, or shots, can quicken or reduce *tempo*. Only the screen offers such pictorial possibilities, and only *the eye* can receive and communicate to the brain such impressions. Quick flashes of, say, a crouching figure—an explosion—a hand stiffening—a face grinning—a woman sobbing—a newspaper placard—car wheels—a grave—sunshine—whatever the sequence may be about—the eye records instantaneously, and the mind understands, and so the film succeeds. But in order that the film may portray incidents in filmic time it must be *completely free to show short and long sequences of sufficient duration to plant the meaning of each*—completely free in a film sense. How then does Dialogue alter this basic principle of film construction?

It alters it in every way—making it, in fact, practically impossible, and in doing so, forcibly allies the screen with the stage, for, in the dialogue film, shots must be retained long enough for the *necessary dialogue to be spoken*. Film construction, therefore, becomes dependent on the spoken word, and not the visual image. What the spoken word explains in one hundred feet of film, the silent film can emphasize in twenty if properly constructed. Two people talking to each other on the screen are at the very best a photographic reproduction, endeavouring to get as near to reality as is photographically possible. The silent film achieves something altogether different. It will be seen, therefore, that the

introduction of dialogue seriously restricts the imaginative producer, who has to reduce action for dialogue. Dialogue adds nothing in significance, not, at least, *when it is direct*, that is, when the person seen on the screen is speaking. For the human ear is not selective, and whilst the eye is capable of switching from scene to scene just as quickly as the slickest producer cares to present the scenes, the ear is far behind. Furthermore, speech is inflexible. It must take its time, thereby taking the time of the film, which, to all intents and purposes, remains stationary whilst the dialogue is spoken.

And the real essence of the film is that it does not remain stationary—it is for ever moving, knowing no bounds, now presenting hundreds of flashes, now moving carefully and rhythmically around, but never static. It would appear then that the dialogue film is contrary to the aim of the cinema, though, as it is making great sums of money, there is a great deal in its favour. But it is not *of the cinema, nor of the stage*, though it is interfering with the progress of both.

What then is to happen? Surely the wonderful invention for reproducing sound is not to be regarded as a menace? On the contrary, it is offering to the Film something which, if utilized rightly, will make it the **greatest** and most individual medium of expression so far devised."

However, before discussing the right application of sound, I will deal with a big problem with which the present dialogue film has confronted the industry—the question of language.

The power of the Film lies, or should lie, in its universal

appeal. Previous to the introduction of dialogue, American and English films were easily understood in every country in the world. Chaplin is as well known in Calcutta as Clacton. Languages presented no obstacles—captions being translated, where necessary, for the markets in question. Now, however, an English-speaking film loses most of its foreign markets, so that language is the most serious obstacle to the securing of world distribution. Methods so crude as to be almost unbelievable are adopted to overcome the difficulty. For instance, an American dialogue film has captions printed over the scenes explaining, in various languages, what the characters are saying or, alternatively, captions are inserted at *inconvenient* intervals in films which are also speaking for themselves!

Another method is to print silent versions of a dialogue Film, and add captions and a musical accompaniment, but I leave you to imagine the pictorial result of an American dialogue picture, reduced to silence, produced in the first instance to permit the action to be explained in dialogue *tempo*, and refashioned with, say, Chinese captions, the picture *action* being necessarily reduced to a minimum!

There have been, of course, outstanding productions of such importance that separate versions have been produced in their entirety in several languages, thereby doubling and trebling production costs, and entailing separate casts—in fact, remaking the entire film. We in Great Britain cannot, perhaps, appreciate the money spent and trouble taken to make foreign versions of films, being so thoroughly accustomed to listening to American Talkies.

The French masterpiece *Le Million* overcame the difficulty of showing the film in London by introducing two English-speaking characters on the roof of the house in which the comedy was being enacted, who periodically explained what had been going on in the film, a device so crude as to ruin the production as far as I was concerned. I would infinitely have preferred to remain in ignorance of the plot (had this been possible) than to have the action rudely interrupted by characters addressing each other like a couple of mentally deficient yokels. It was the old stage aside pushing its way into the newest form of expression. If so brilliant a producer as Clair has been unable to devise a better method of overcoming the language problem than this, save by the expensive way of making separate versions for each nation, it seems that the end is far away.

But dialogue has come, and it is going to be exploited to the full, and the Film is being lost in the noise. Nothing, in my opinion, has retarded the progress of the cinema so seriously as the coming of the Talkie, though, at the risk of creating a paradox, I would add that the coming of the Talkie has hastened the arrival of the day when sound will be applied in such a way that the power of the Film will be increased far beyond present realization.

Just how this can be achieved we shall see later, for before it is possible to understand fully the true way to utilize sound in conjunction with the Film, it is necessary for us to study and become conversant with the other elements of film construction, from the Story, *via* the Studio, to the Cutting Bench. Only when we have learnt

how films' are made can we hope to learn how they *should* be made.

In the foregoing remarks I have endeavoured to point out the fundamental error of combining direct speech with the moving image, on the screen—an error made no less serious by the ever-increasing popularity of the Talkie. The future of the Film is in the balance, primarily because the interest of film-makers is in the balance in the bank, and not in the future of the Film. Present conditions need not blind any of us. However magnificent the portals of cinemas may be, however impressive the thickly carpeted lounges which lead to the gold and silver auditoriums by the longest way round—so that we may pass softly-lit statues, bubbling fountains, and powdered flunkies before we are in sight of the screen—these are but parts of the massive frame in which it is the picture which matters, though in so many instances it would seem to matter least.

There is one other point I would raise in this regard. It is commonly thought that any attempt to improve the Film is "highbrow," and that the results could not possibly be "commercial." I have no hesitation in saying that the multitudes would instantly appreciate a film that was true to its medium, and would find it infinitely more exhilarating if they had the opportunity of comparing it with the conventional dialogue picture. What people have not seen they quite naturally cannot be expected to miss. "Browism" does not enter into the question of films which are genuinely Sound films, for like all forms of true Art they are, or would be, universally understood and appreciated.



PLATE V

SHOOTING A BALLROOM SCENE FOR *The Congress Dances*

Directed by Erik Charell, producer of *White Horse Inn*
Cfa

And so, having dared to question the construction of the modern motion picture, and suggested that, despite all outward appearances, it is unrolling itself over the brink of a dangerous abyss, let us see just how it is made, and then, perhaps, we shall be in a position to substantiate our criticism with practical suggestions for creating the film of the future. Rest assured, Hollywood will be immediately and openly grateful for any help in any direction, for despite its super-sophistication, it is full of extremely simple people all following each other in a maze, and all wondering where the end is, and how long they can "keep on keeping on." Show them the way, and in a flash they will be showing it to you!

CHAPTER IV

THE FILM STORY

THE Adaptation—The Original Story—Art where art thou?—The box-office octopus

THE story of the film story is a sad one, but being the basis of the Film, it must be told.

Let us not begin by asking what is wrong, but what is right with it, and let us not be too downhearted when we discover that, in the majority of cases, little is right.

Apart from the usual exceptions, there is really no such thing as a "film story," by which one implies a story originally conceived for portrayal by the Film. Maybe that appears to be a somewhat exaggerated statement, and yet practically every film is founded upon a story which was not originally created for expression on the screen.

To a casual observer it does not really matter what such a story was originally conceived or written for, providing that it lends itself to the screen. In fact, the greatest successes have been made from stories adapted from various other mediums of expression having no connection with the Film. Should we, therefore, ignore the origin of a film story, and judge only the finished production? Certainly we should if we attach no importance to the Film, regarding it merely as something to watch whenever we have an hour or so to waste. But those who think about it in that light can neither have realized the importance of the Film, nor have its future at heart.

Let us become acquainted with the methods adopted by the industry when approaching the story problem, and assume that a producing and renting organization is planning its new schedule. It is arranging to produce, say, twelve big pictures during the coming year, and it sets about the problem of selecting suitable "stories" in the following manner. Firstly, of course, its recent successes and failures govern, to a great extent, the type of subjects chosen. Also, as you may know, certain *types* of stories have distinct vogues, such as "War films," "Back-stage dramas," "Thrillers," "Religious dramas," or "Revues," and Hollywood lessens the life of each of these types by flooding the market with them until people are sick to death of whatever particular type happens to be the current craze. These vogues necessarily influence companies in selecting future material, and few competent film concerns make the error of selecting a subject which can be placed in any one of the above categories, if that type of film has had its day.

Proceeding with the selection of material, the first consideration is naturally that every story a company produces must be a "winner," and the task is to visualize it in film form, and decide which stars can provide the pulling power.

Now, it has been discovered that there are at least two kinds of stories which are almost certain "winners": *the successful stage play*, and *the successful novel*. Add to these the works of authors possessing very big names, and you have practically all the sources from which film companies obtain their stories.

A play that has had a long run on Broadway, or in

London, or both, is almost bound to be filmed, irrespective of whether it appears to lend itself to adaptation to the screen or not. In many cases successful plays, written by dramatists who are naturally quite ignorant of the requirements of the Film, have been produced, and with the coming of the dialogue film, the practice has increased enormously, nothing being easier than to film a talking version of a stage play. Also, nothing is killing *the Film* more speedily.

Novels, too, both classic and modern, to say nothing of countless American short stories, have been "adapted." I have seen the most impossible situations arise out of novels being "shot," and, again, sometimes I have seen masterpieces expressed on the screen so accurately as to make one feel that if plays and novels do lend themselves to be filmed, they certainly should be.

But no, it will not do! EVEN IF A PLAY, NOVEL, POEM, OR ANY OTHER FORM OF EXPRESSION IS OBVIOUSLY PERFECT SCREEN MATERIAL, IT SHOULD NOT BE USED AS SUCH, FOR THE SAKE OF THE FILM. Why? Because the Film is a distinct and independent medium of expression, and as such, it is essential that it shall be used to express *only* those things which are originally conceived for it. Is it not wrong that what is perhaps the greatest, most far-reaching medium of all the Arts, should be the only one *depending on other Arts for its material*? It is a most lamentable state of affairs, and one which is *likely* to continue indefinitely whilst the present class of films proves remunerative.

Again, whether we be interested spectators or "in the business," we find ourselves asking why it should matter

whether a film is based on a novel or a play, if it proves successful; and from every material point of view—and with due regard for the importance of the material side—it does not matter.

There is, fortunately, another aspect, best illustrated by asking why it matters if photographs are painted over and submitted to the Royal Academy? Indeed, would it matter if there were no Academy, if poets never wrote again, or if the Old Vic started to produce adaptations from screen comedies, which had been adapted from classical dramas? What do any of these matter? Very little to a very large number of people, who, however, *depend upon the minority*, to whom everything matters.

The present policy of adapting works conceived for and expressed through other mediums is preventing the Film from flowering to its fullest extent. However brilliantly executed these adaptations may be, they most definitely are not true examples of film expression.

Let us consider, first, the points in favour of the adaptation. The producing concern selects a novel written by Miss X, who is the best known of the best-sellers. Her stories are eagerly read, as serials in the Press, in monthly magazines, and in novel form. Thousands of her books are sold annually. A film adapted from one of her successful stories would be a sensation, and the millions who had read it would rush to see it on the screen, whilst those who had not would also rush, most probably reading it afterwards. Surely, therefore, this would be preferable to filming a story created specially for the screen by a person whose name was comparatively

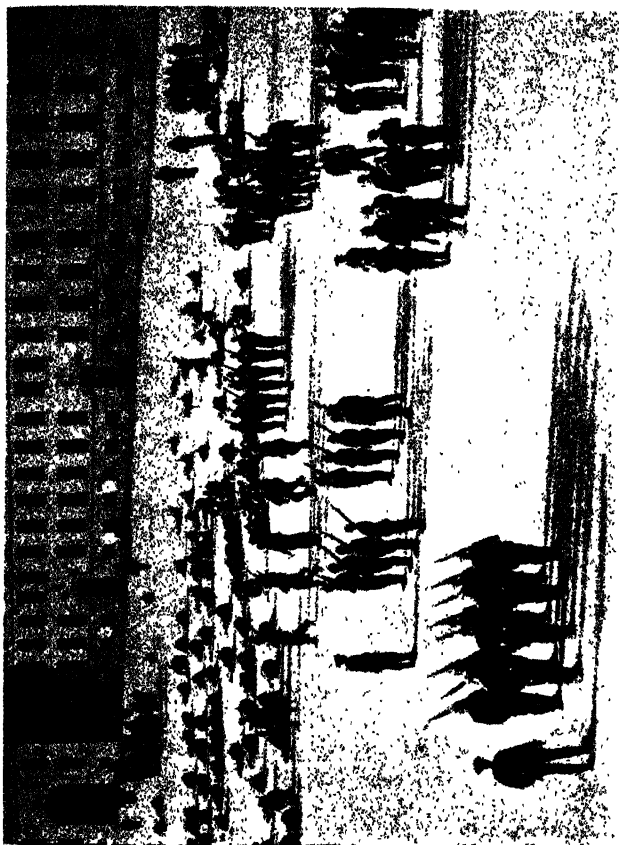


PLATE VI
All Quiet on the Western Front
Universal

unknown. Commercially, yes. The big name of the author, and the familiarity of the title of a best-seller, will prove to be its "selling points" and are the reasons for adapting it—not, you observe, because it is a story which lends itself to portrayal on the screen. Any story, of course, can be screened, and, in the hands of an ingenious scenarist it can be so transformed that the poor novelist is unable to recognize her own work. She will sit in the theatre wondering if she is dreaming. "Surely there was no motor crash in my story, and no pilgrimage to the Far East, and no enormous cabaret show, and no happy ending!" No, such events were not conceived by her, and although the characters possess the names she bestowed upon them, they bear no physical resemblance to the children of her brain (how could they?) nor are they behaving as she made them behave.

Needless to say, there are exceptions to this kind of travesty, the foremost, to my mind, being the delightful screen adaptation made, several years ago, of Barrie's *Peter Pan*, which one readily sees lends itself to the screen—for camera magic can create the most extraordinary illusions, and is capable of presenting a fairy-land to which the stage could never aspire. Had Barrie written *Peter Pan* specially for the screen, it could hardly have been improved. But that is quite an exception. *All Quiet on the Western Front*, another outstanding adaptation originally written in novel form, is a different case, for the novel is based on actual events and the film might quite easily have been taken direct from "life," save for the introduction of the same characters and certain sequences appearing in the book.



PLATE VII
All Quiet on the Western Front
Universal

To-day, adaptations of legitimate stage plays are the fashion, and we are quite accustomed to sit through a talking picture the action of which is confined to one or two palatial apartments, the equivalents of the scenes on the stage. There is entertainment here, but no Film.

What is the advantage? Primarily, enormous additional revenue is obtained for the producers of a stage play, for in film form it circulates throughout the nation, and perhaps other nations, adding several leases of life to the original show. But this kind of thing cannot continue if the Film is to survive, and develop into a medium of importance. Furthermore, the ever-increasing stage-to-screen policy has naturally resulted in comparisons being made between one medium and the other—"I liked the film much better than the play," or *vice versa*. This is an impossible situation.

Now, in putting forward this plea for original "stories" on the grounds that the Film is a sufficiently important art to stand on its own feet, one must not lose sight of the fact that the adaptation is a money-making proposition, reducing risks to a minimum. But experience shows that neither the purely aesthetic attitude nor the grossly commercial one will guide the Film along the right path. It is the middle course which must be taken, with one sensitive eye fixed on the aesthetic importance of the screen, and one sensible eye on the material results. They are interrelated. Unfortunately, the commercial aspect dominates the situation entirely; hence the position to-day. Throughout Hollywood and Elstree one finds the financial magnate interfering with the creative

work, and actually refashioning and "improving" the work of the creative people he employs, but nowhere can one find the creative people being allowed to tamper with the financial side!

There seems little hope of a compromise. Any unusual suggestions which may be forthcoming for creating films which would be both commercially successful *and* true to their medium are invariably rejected. Only the certain "winners"—the adaptations—are selected.

Mr. Hiram K. Slick says that a certain Broadway play will make a great film, and any one who disputes his opinion or attempts to voice the above argument is a lunatic, with no understanding of Business. The play is bought, produced, seen, and forgotten.

Nevertheless, as the adaptation has become established, novelists and playwrights have begun to write with a view to selling the film rights, and consequently their efforts have contained more "picture" value than hitherto.

Curiously enough, however, film-makers have apparently yet to learn *that the Film has no connection with literature, nor is it able to express it*. Perhaps this statement will require some elucidation in view of the countless literary and dramatic works which have been presented, or misrepresented, on the screen, for by becoming accustomed to seeing them, we have allied literary forms with the Film. Novelists express their situations and scenes by written descriptions, and dramatists by dialogue, *but the scenarist must tell his story with images only*—moving images aided by sound, at present in the form of the modern dialogue picture in which the characters

are seen speaking, and their words are audible. Now, the work of the scenarist is fundamentally different from that of any other artist, and he is only a writer in so far as he uses a pen to record the series of images he visualizes. He is a person who thinks in pictures, not words. It will be seen, therefore, how little the Film has to do with literature, despite the fact that it is a dramatic art, and so the true scenarist creating the true film should not be likened to the dramatist at all. This fact, incidentally, is a point against the dialogue film, the scenario of which closely resembles a stage play, bringing the two mediums near together, and the scenarist and dramatist side by side, the former literally copying out the dialogue which the latter wrote originally for the stage. But that is not scenario writing, nor is the result a film.

And that brings us to the important point that novelists and dramatists, no matter how famous, are quite possibly the most unsuitable people from whom to expect original film material. It is rather like advising C. B. Cochran to approach Augustus John for a sophisticated comedy to fill a new theatre, or assuming that because Noel Coward is a brilliant dramatist and musician, he is also an accomplished sculptor. Similarly, Bernard Shaw has not proved, by his plays, that he is a likely person from whom to expect a brilliant scenario. Yet it is perhaps natural to assume that people famous in one creative art will show capacity in the other arts, and almost unthinkingly one would approach a famous writer for a film story, and probably be disappointed with the result, *for it requires a distinctly different type of mind to create a film.* It requires a new mind, entirely free of literary

traditions, possessing the vision of a painter, and the constructive and methodical ability of an architect, a mind that responds to rhythm, and is able to weave images into a rhythmic whole—a cultured mind—but not, primarily, a literary one.

Mention of Bernard Shaw compels reference to the work with which he made his screen début—*How He Lied to Her Husband*. There is possibly no more vivid example of the futility of adapting stage plays to the screen than this. Altogether apart from the great value of Bernard Shaw's name, it should be obvious to most people that his plays, containing a minimum of action and a maximum of dialogue, are most unsuitable for the Film, and of all of them, the above is perhaps the most unsuitable—just three people in a room. One can have nothing but praise for this play in its original form, but on the screen the true film was absent, in its pitiful attempt to do just what the stage has done for centuries. It is surprising that so great a dramatist should permit, after withholding his work from the screen, so unsuitable a piece to be "adapted" for public presentation. The many picture-goers familiar with Bernard Shaw *by name only*, or by the frequent inconsequential Press paragraphs concerning his activities, will be disappointed if they regard *How He Lied to Her Husband* as representative of his work. Would it not have been better had he selected an act or two from *Back to Methuselah*, or better still, have refrained from permitting any of his work to add to the long list of adaptations?

- An adaptation must necessarily limit the action of the film, regardless of its nature, and it sets itself an

impossible task when attempting to portray accurately characters which, in the case of novels, are visualized differently by every reader.

What then, must be the rule to follow if we are to establish the Film on a firm basis, as far removed from the stage as the novel is from the painting? Just this, THAT THE FILM MUST EXPRESS IN ITS OWN UNIQUE WAY, WITH MOVING IMAGES, ONLY THOSE THINGS WHICH NO OTHER MEDIUM CAN EXPRESS. Let the scenarist apply that test to his work (by asking himself whether the subject he is working on can be expressed in terms of the stage or the novel) and he will find himself eliminating the drawing-room comedies, actionless novels and devastating dialogue. Instead, he will discover Rhythm, thereby offering to the Film the chance it has waited for so long, to prove it is an independent form of expression, more powerful than any other.

Does it seem absurd to put forward the suggestion that adaptations are fundamentally wrong, when one thinks of the thousands of films which have been made and proved successful, nearly all of which have been based on novels and plays? If they are universally liked by the public, and make money for their owners, why raise all this commotion? Furthermore, the enormous financial responsibilities involved in film production, excuse, from a material point of view, the continuance of the safe adaptation policy. I am, of course, *purposely adopting the opposite attitude with the sole object of placing the Film on its proper level*—and it is, therefore, necessary to dissociate it from every other medium of expression, both in theory and practice. And it is absolutely essential

that the material it portrays should be original and incapable of being expressed by any other means. Such material would not be unintelligible to the mass of picture-goers. Rather would it be of a more vivid nature than the motion picture as we now know it.

And so one can adopt whichever attitude one wishes towards the Film: either accept it as it is, and be content for it to remain as it is (save for technical improvements), or else regard it as an independent art urgently in need of help to save it from itself. One should forget all the other arts when considering the Film; the scenarist who does not is hastening the day when the stage and the screen will crash together, and the stage, having the advantage of a safety curtain, will survive!

And now, before discussing the scenario in detail, let us consider the person who visualizes the images which it records so minutely. It is generally agreed that the most perfect film can only be produced by the person who originally conceived it, that is, when the producer is the person who first thought of the theme, or story. Of course, it seldom happens that the producer has either created the idea he directs, or has written the scenario, but it would be better were this so, for no matter how exact a scenario may be, it is not humanly possible to interpret to perfection, in terms of images, the conception of another mind. Theoretically, therefore, the scenarist and producer should be one and the same individual.

There are several producers who create their own scenarios, and moreover, their own stories, but in the majority of cases, a producer is engaged to make a picture from a scenario already written.

And so we can now learn just how a film story is created, from the moment when it is first conceived, until it is in complete scenario form, ready for production in the studio.

The following chapter is, of course, not at all concerned with whether a subject is an adaptation or an original story, but solely with its preparation for the camera.

CHAPTER V

BEHIND THE SCREENS

THE Script—Scenario Secrets—Synopsis and Continuity—Studio Impressions—The Art Department—Lights—Colour

A FILM audience is unconscious of the fact that hundreds of separate film strips make up the smooth-running picture it is witnessing, for these strips follow each other in such rapid succession that they appear as one ever-changing reel.

Apart from scene changes, there are the changing positions of the cameras in the same scene, resulting in separate "shots." To further exemplify this important point, which is the basis of the scenario, let us recall any film for a moment.

A man is addressing a woman in a room. Firstly, one sees the whole room and the two figures, which are standing at a considerable distance away; then a close-up of the man, immediately followed by a shot which takes one nearer to both figures than the first long shot; following this is a close-up of the woman, which may quite possibly be followed by another close-up of the man, and then back to the original long shot which opened the scene. There are six distinct camera positions, which when joined together may take half a minute to project on the screen—six separate shots, to portray a brief conversation between two people, and photographed so that the audience can become intimately acquainted with both actors by means of the close-ups and the moderately

near shots. Had the scene been enacted in only one shot—the first one, the audience could not have “got into touch” with the characters, and more important still, would have become conscious of the fact, although it would not be able to attribute a particular cause to it. On the other hand, the audience is oblivious of the fact that it has seen six shots during the above scene, which appear on the screen as one.

Now, every shot, however short, is recorded by the scenarist in his script. It has its correct place and number. Moreover, every shot is known as a “scene,” which must not be confused with a scene or setting in which the action is taking place. The change of an actual scene, pictorially, is denoted by a new *sequence* in the Shooting Script. Therefore, the basis of a scenario is that firstly, it is a record of *everything* which will be seen on the screen; and secondly, that it is divided into sequences which, in turn, are divided into scenes (varying camera positions)—resulting in scenes within scenes. Consequently, if it takes, say, six scenes or shots to show two people talking for half a minute, one realizes the hundreds of shots needed to create a film which will run for nearly two hours. The above method of shooting scenes (camera positions) within scenes is simplified by the methodical system of allocating a number to the scene proper and lettering each of the shots taken within it in alphabetical order, resulting in the above conversation being described as, for instance, Scene 47, Shots A, B, C, D, E, and F.

Every shot is planned (always, of course, subject to modification or improvement by director and camera-man in conference), and the remarkable thing is that the

fragmentary nature of all these scenes is not apparent to the audience.

We are now slightly acquainted with a scenario, but before it has reached the stage when it is entitled to be called a shooting script, meaning that it contains every shot necessary for the producing of the film, it has to pass through several stages, and the first development evolved from the original idea born in the mind of the scenarist is known as the *Treatment*. The treatment is a descriptive synopsis of a non-technical nature, explaining the whole theme of the proposed film, details of characters, locations—everything to enable one to judge as to the suitability of the subject, and, in cases where the subject has already been approved, or is familiar in novel or play form, to judge as to the suitability of the suggested treatment of that subject. In reality, it is a scenario in short story form, though let us not forget that it is concerned only with images—the scenarist seeing and thinking in terms of pictures, his ideas being of such a nature that they can be interpreted plastically on the screen. The three stages, therefore, are—

- (a) First outline of the idea.
- (b) The Treatment.
- (c) The Scenario or Shooting Script.

A successful scenarist must possess several unique qualifications. In the first place, as previously emphasized, he must have learnt to think in terms of images. Secondly, he must have a knowledge of film production and studio technique. Add to this a genius for detail, and an ability to interpret a logical story in terms of shots,

which when correctly assembled will create a perfect continuity.

I intend explaining production methods and studio technique in a later chapter; nevertheless, it is necessary at this stage to deal with several aspects of studio work in order to explain scenario construction completely.

Firstly, there is the bewildering practice of shooting scenes out of their order. The scenario contains, say, one hundred scenes, fifty of which are exteriors (out of doors) and fifty interiors (to be taken in the studio). In the scenario these scenes will, of course, be interspersed, according to the requirements of the narrative, but the scenarist will have tabulated at the end of his script the number of shots to be taken in each scene. For instance, the action of a story takes place in an English country house, a Turkish harem, and Tooting Broadway: naturally, all these locations will appear *throughout* the film, which might possibly begin and end in the baronial hall of the country house. It is not possible, therefore, to shoot the scenes in the order in which they will ultimately appear on the screen, unless each scene is being constantly pulled down and erected again. Therefore, all the country house scenes are shot consecutively, after which the set is demolished to make room for the Turkish harem. Under these circumstances, the importance of correctly numbering each shot will be seen, otherwise the cutting rooms would be filled with hundreds of film strips which it would be almost humanly impossible to assemble correctly, and the expense of erecting and demolishing the sets every time they were required would ruin even an American producing concern! This method results, of

course, in all sorts of curious situations, as, for example, the hero making a speech at his wedding breakfast in the baronial hall, on his return from Turkey, before (from the producer's point of view) he has either gone to Turkey, or even met the woman he is to marry in the last scene.

Again, exteriors to be taken in this country must be shot whenever the weather permits—another reason for shooting scenes out of order!

Most important of all, however, from the purely dramatic point of view, is the fact that studio production, as exemplified above, deprives the actor of any chance of sustained acting. Rarely, if ever, does he play in more than three comparatively short scenes in a day, and they are, invariably, unintelligible to him unless he has studied the scenario with more than usual concentration. This makes the finished production all the more remarkable when the consistency of the acting is found to be on a high level. A further example will emphasize the difference between scenes as produced, and when assembled. The hero is seen *in* his cottage on the moors. He opens the door and walks out. The interior of the cottage was taken in the studio, say, in January, whereas the exterior shot showing him closing the door from the outside and walking over the actual moors was taken, perhaps, three months later, many miles away.

Is there not some excuse, therefore, if he is seen to be wearing spats in the cottage, at the moment when he opened the door to go out, but was without them when he shut the door outside and walked away! Most decidedly not, for an alert member of the fair sex who

is known as the Floor Secretary made a special note of everything the hero wore in January so that he shall wear the same in March. She is responsible for all such details, and has an exceedingly difficult task.

Next we must become acquainted with the various capabilities of the camera, and the technical terms used to describe them. How such effects are obtained by the camera-man is not, of course, the business of the scenarist, and so we will leave such explanations until we reach the chapter dealing with cameras in general, contenting ourselves for the present with learning the most generally used technical terms and studio lingo which the scenarist is conversant with.

FADE-IN AND FADE-OUT. Doubtless the reader has watched a film fade in and also fade out. Gradually, the blank screen has grown lighter and the scene or opening title appears. The fade-in is used to commence a film, and also to introduce new sequences in that film; in the latter case, it works in conjunction with the fade-out which, of course, has ended the preceding sequence, causing the picture to disappear slowly. The essential need for fading will be easily understood, for it enables the various separate sequences to be "put aside" temporarily whilst the action of other sequences is disclosed, thereby keeping a number of sequences, all interrelated, moving forward to a common climax, without any of them breaking off suddenly. To a considerable extent the Fades govern the rhythm of a film, and by reason of their slow movement, too many tend to make the whole production move slowly.

CUT SHOTS. The antithesis of the fade is the cut

shot, which is a film strip beginning and ending abruptly. Naturally, a number of cut shots joined together will produce a far quicker rhythm than a series of shots which fade into each other. The cut shot is invaluable for a multitude of purposes. If, for instance, a long shot has slowly faded in, portraying a room in which a figure is seen pointing at a picture on the wall, and it is necessary for the audience to obtain a close view of that picture, it would be both illogical and tedious if the picture close-up faded in, too. And so a cut shot is made of it and joined into the middle of the long shot. This cut would be quite short, and the long shot would then be resumed.

Every film is largely composed of cut shots. Assume a new sequence in a production has faded in on a long shot, showing several people gambling; close-up cut shots would follow, of each of the characters, and in the case of conversation between two of them, cut shots of each would appear alternately. A cut shot which is very short is sometimes termed a "flash." A number of flashes joined together create very quick *tempo*, as witnessed in many Russian films, the battle scenes in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and many of the sequences in *Drifters*—a series of lightning impressions each just sufficiently long to impress itself on the mind *via* the eye.

THE MIX OR DISSOLVE. Sometimes a scene, instead of ending abruptly or slowly fading out, will magically and gradually "melt" into another. This is known as Mixing or Dissolving, and serves a number of useful purposes. As its movement is slow, it creates slow rhythm as in the case of the fade, but its main functions are to signify

lapses of time, and to create an association of images. The following will exemplify the former method. We are watching a wood carver. The first shot shows him with a rough lump of wood at which he is hewing. He is going to carve a figure which will probably take him six weeks to complete. Obviously the camera-man cannot wait quite so long, turning out miles and miles of film which would show the entire process, and so dissolves are made, meaning that shots are taken at various stages of the carving, each one mixing into the other, the effect on the screen being a smooth-running picture showing the transformation of a lump of wood into a carved figure—occupying, at the outside, say, five minutes. It is immediately apparent how unfinished and jarring the result would be if the above shots, instead of dissolving into each other, were cut shots joined together abruptly—creating the effect of the wood jumping from one stage to another.

“Jumps” must always be avoided. The usual method of showing a complete process, such as the carving of the wooden figure, is to have several pieces of wood, each in a more advanced stage than the last, so that each dissolved into the other creates the desired illusion.

The second use of the dissolve, for associating images and thoughts, will be made clear by the following example. At the beginning of a film a murder was committed, and suspicion rests on a certain character. The scene of the murder was a barn. Considerably later on in the film, the suspected man is seen sitting alone thinking, and his image slowly dissolves into the scene of the barn, and slowly dissolves back again to him, thereby associating

images in the minds of the audience, and revealing the character's thoughts.

Again, Dissolves enable a producer to condense a long journey, or series of related events, into a minute or so, such as by the following shots dissolving into each other—

A hand slams a label on a trunk :
the character in question enters a railway carriage :
fields rushing past carriage windows :
the locomotive's funnel from which steam is rushing :
the funnel of a liner from which steam is rushing :
ship's engines at full speed ahead :
the character looking out to sea :
feet walking up gangway :
the trunk being opened :
hotel key being taken off hook.

There, condensed into a series of vivid shots, is a long journey, which, in itself, may not be sufficiently important to justify a great deal of footage, and yet is essential for the narrating of the story.

It may be thought that each of the above shots could be "Cuts" jumping from one to another, which would both shorten the sequence and quicken its *tempo*. This is so, but the psychological effect would be wrong—for time would not be taken into account, and one would jump from, say, the locomotive's funnel to the ship's funnel, whereas Mixing accounts for five minutes, hours, weeks, or months. The psychological effect is to create the impression of a long journey which is portrayed without hurry, in *Film Time*.

THE PANORAMA OR "PAN" SHOT. Cameras on stationary tripods can be made to move up and down, and from side to side. These movements are known as "Pan"

shots, because the result is a panorama of the scene before the camera. The uses of the "Pan" shot are several. On Exteriors, for instance, it will embrace a vast landscape. By quickly "panning" the camera, fast-moving figures are kept in view, such as riders galloping across plains, greyhounds racing, dancers. Gyroscopic tripods enable expert camera-men to "pan" in almost every direction, following the action of football matches, polo, and other fast movement. In the studio, however, the "Pan" serves a different purpose: to "pan" from one group of figures to another, or to "pan" along a room until a figure at the other end comes into view. To "pan" quickly on objects very near the camera is to create a blurred effect on the screen, just as one gets a blurred impression of a room if the head is turned quickly from side to side.

TRACKING. In addition to movement on a stationary tripod the camera can be mounted on a truck or trolley, so that the whole instrument moves backwards and forwards, commencing, for example, with a close-up of a dining-table and gliding backwards, gradually disclosing the whole room. As it is wheeled, it can also, of course, be "panned" up and down, and from side to side, so that a double movement is obtained.

At this point, I would mention that the extraordinary flexibility of cameras, and the seemingly endless effects which are now obtainable, should not be exploited unnecessarily by the scenarist in his shooting script, for he has to bear in mind that the camera must never make itself felt in a production. Handled with understanding, a camera can glide hither and thither, "pan" from here

to there, when necessary, and the audience will be unconscious of its movements, being solely conscious of the ease with which they can follow the action. But immediately the camera is made to perform tricks which do not further the action, but merely display the cleverness of the camera-man, the audience will become irritated, or bewildered, or both.

FLYING SHOTS. More remarkable still are shots taken with cameras suspended in the air, which swing over the heads of the characters. There were some excellent examples of flying shots in *Metropolis*, *City of Song*, and *Monte Carlo*.

It will be seen that the scenarist has to take the question of MOVEMENT into careful consideration, for he has, firstly, the movement of his characters; secondly, the movement of the camera, which *itself* can be either stationary or moving, and thirdly, he has to judge the movement of the film as a whole, the pace of which will be governed by the speed at which the strips follow each other—either in rapid succession as cut shots, or slowly fading or mixing into each other. All these forms of MOVEMENT regulate the rhythm of the complete Film.

INSERT. An insert is a shot, usually a close-up, of, for instance, a letter, visiting card, or magnified portion of a newspaper, which it is necessary for the audience to read. Inserts are cut shots inserted into longer shots showing a character reading the matter in question.

MASKS. Occasionally, pictures appear framed in the shape of the two lenses of binoculars, a keyhole, a triangle, etc. This effect is created by fitting into the camera a small metal mask cut out in any of the above shapes. The

first-mentioned is the most commonly used, as it concentrates the gaze of onlookers on to a moving figure in a vast exterior (a horse and rider appearing as mere specks, riding up a mountain pass), a shot invariably preceded by a character gazing on the same scene through field-glasses.

MAIN LEAD. This is the name given to the opening descriptive title or titles which begin the film, as distinct from sub-titles, which are little used since the arrival of talking films, except in News and Interest reels.

FOOTAGE. Only experience in a studio will enable a scenarist to estimate the footage of film required to portray the action he is planning, but the following figures will serve to some extent to form a basis.

Feature films measure anything from 4,000 to 7,000 or 8,000 ft., whilst Super-productions vary from 10,000 to 12,000 ft. Films are always divided up into reels of, approximately, 1,000 ft. News and Interest reels are usually under the thousand.

Silent films are projected more slowly than Talking films (for reasons explained in the next chapter), running at the rate of 16 pictures¹ (frames) a second, whereas the latter run at 24 pictures per second. Therefore, 1,000 feet of Silent film will occupy about fifteen minutes on the screen, and the same footage of Talking film will take about eleven minutes.

Few shots are shorter than four feet, which appears on the screen as the merest Flash, but there is no limit to the length of a shot, although the result of making very long shots when each could have been split into several different angles is neither desirable nor imaginative.

¹ Each separate picture in a strip of film is known as a frame.

It will be seen how necessary it is for a scenarist to be able to estimate the footage of the scenes he is planning, as without such ability it would be quite impossible for him to create a practical production. As I have previously pointed out, the Dialogue film has completely altered film construction and "Film Time," shots having to remain until the character has finished speaking his sentence, irrespective of footage. As a general rule, however, it will be found that whilst shots of inanimate objects can be as short as from 4 to 6 ft., close-ups of characters (not allowing for speech) are usually about 6 to 8 ft., unless any special characteristic demanding attention makes it necessary for the close-up to be retained for a longer period. Long shots showing plenty of action are sometimes as long as 50 ft, but are interspersed with short close-ups.

We shall now see how the above terms are applied to scenario-writing, in extracts from a fictitious scenario, which we may call "The Broadway Malady." This first example will show the general method of writing a script containing fast-moving sequences throughout—

Fade in

Main Lead : PRICELESS PRODUCTIONS INCORPORATED
present

"THE BROADWAY MALADY"

A Super Extravaganza

adapted from the famous play

"NEW YORK KNIGHTS"

Dissolve into : Story by . . . Music by . . .
(Credit title) Art direction by . . . Synchronization by . . .
Film Editor . . . Photographed by . . .
Recorded by the XYZ system.

Dissolve into : Produced by Hank Q. Hunk.

(Credit title) *Fade out and into Picture*

(Note that the above typical opening of a film moves slowly,

the introductory titles taking considerable footage, and mixing into each other.

(The opening shot of the picture fades in from the fade out of the last title.)

SEQUENCE I.

Scene 1. *Fade in* : Close shot of tenement bedroom window, which is opened by an old man. He is terrified and shouts for help.

Cut

Scene 2. Long shot of street taken from window. Policeman on street corner hearing cries, looks up towards camera, and runs out of picture, obviously to the house.

Cut

Scene 3. Another window opens. Woman's head appears. (Close-up.)

Cut

Scene 4. Running feet of crowd. Hum of excited conversation accompanies this shot.

Cut

Scene 5. Landing of house. Figure of man who slowly opens door, peers out, and runs up passage past camera.

Cut

Scene 6. Policeman running up stairs towards camera, which shoots down the flight.

Cut

Scene 7. Man's figure hiding in shadow of corner.

Cut

Scene 8. Cut back to Scene 1. Old man shouting for help from window.

Cut

Scene 9. Close-up of hand lifting telephone receiver.

Cut

Scene 10. Exchange operator plugging in. This is to be a flash of not more than 5 ft.

Cut

Scene 11. Police station telephone. Officer answering ringing instrument.

Cut

Scene 12. Cut back to Scene 7. Figure of man emerges from shadow, only to hasten back as footsteps are heard.

Cut

Scene 13. Cut back to Scene 5. Door on landing being forced by policeman and a tenant.

Cut

Scene 14. Cut back to Scene 1 on longer shot. Old man lowering himself from window on sheet. Sounds of door being broken in are heard.

It will be seen in the above exaggerated example that only Cut Shots are used, which follow each other in rapid succession, the action demanding a quick *tempo*. Several scenes naturally reappear from time to time. Assuming, therefore, that the above sequence is but a fragment of an 8,000 ft. film, it will be realized how frequently the same scenes must reappear. A list similar to the following example must, therefore, be added, to enable the production unit to systematize its schedule. This list shows at a glance how many times each Scene is required, so that all action can be shot in it, irrespective of logical order, after which the set will be demolished—

Scene 1. Smith's bedroom window. Exterior. Also 8 and 14.

Scene 2. Landing. Interior. Also 12.

Scene 5. Long shot Landing. Also 13.

Consequently the shots showing—

- (a) Window opening and man shouting ;
- (b) Man again shouting ;
- (c) Man lowering himself from window, whilst sounds of door being forced are heard ;

would be shot consecutively, after which the scene representing the window (unless a real window is used) would be pulled down to make way for the next set. Similarly, throughout the production, this principle is the only one which it is practical to employ, with the exception of sets erected in very large studios which permit several scenes to stand at the same time, enabling certain sequences to be shot in their right order. Naturally, a complete scenario would contain references to Scenes in this manner—

Scene 5. Exterior. Also 8, 14, 22, 147, 153, 202-3-4-5-6, 240.

And now an example of a scenario in which the action is slow, and the *tempo* of the whole production made to move in harmony with the subject—

SEQUENCE 23.

Scene 42. *Slow fade in*: Close-up of the peasant girl asleep in hay.

Scene 43. *Dissolve into*: Long shot field, figure of the girl lying to left of picture. Camera slowly "pans" to the right, until it has left field and is concentrated on winding country lane, along which a herd of cows moves slowly.

Scene 44. *Dissolve into*: Long shot from behind herd, with back of young drover in foreground of picture. The cows turn off lane into field.

Cut

- Scene 45. Medium shot of peasant girl. The cows enter field behind her. She awakens.

Cut

- Scene 46. Close-up of drover staring past camera at girl. Slowly an expression of hatred is seen on his face.

Cut

- Scene 47. Medium close-up of girl's face, wearing terrified expression. A lark is heard singing, and she looks upwards, listening, her expression changing.

- Scene 48. *Dissolve into:* Drover looks upwards, listening; the music of the bird's song has driven his hatred away.

- Scene 49. *Dissolve into:* Long shot: drover resumes his work, slowly driving cows into an old barn to the left of stack where girl lies. The lark's song grows fainter and fainter as scene slowly fades out.

The use of slow fades, dissolves, and "pans" as above, helps to create the desired slow-moving action.

Here is another example showing how the camera is made to contribute to the rhythmic gaiety of a dancing scene.

- Scene 22. Fade in on a close-up of the back of the orchestra leader. He is beating time with his whole body. Camera then tracks away from him, revealing first the stage on which the band plays and gradually the dancers. They whirl round the camera, which continues its smooth, backward tracking until the entire ballroom is seen in a long shot, the orchestra now being at the far end.

Cut

Scene 23. Close-up of dancing feet. Camera then "pans" quickly upwards until it reaches the masked face of a woman in the balcony, looking down on the gay scene. She throws streamers on the dancers.

Cut

Scene 24. Camera tracking along dancers who are moving in opposite direction.

Cut

Scene 25. Camera swinging over heads of dancers and back again.

Cut

Scene 26. C.U. Saxophone—fingers pressing notes.

Cut

Scene 27. Long shot of ballroom. The figures of Paul and Betty (hero and heroine) are dancing with others, and gradually nearing camera. When near it, in semi-close-up, they remain swaying sufficiently long for emphasis to be placed on them. Then they cease dancing and walk away, arm in arm, the camera tracking along with them, until they exit through a door.

Cut

Scene 28. Paul and Betty emerging on the terrace, where they sit down. Paul hands Betty a slip of paper which she reads.

Cut

Scene 29. *Insert.* "Dear Betty, I am leaving for Africa to-night. Bertram."

Cut

Scene 30. Cut back. Close-up of Betty reading, a startled expression on her face.

The above details show the use and rhythmic value of moving camera shots. It will have been noticed how leading players can be subtly introduced to the

audience without holding up the action, by the camera concentrating on them, and following them as they walk away.

The artistic application of Sound enables scenes to change frequently whilst a single passage of song is being expressed. Delightful examples of this are to be found in *City of Song*.

A Neapolitan guide stands far away in the arena of the old Coliseum, and sings to the girl whom he is taking on a sight-seeing expedition. He is a mere speck, and ordinarily, one presumes his song would have been shot with alternate scenes showing him in the long shot, and then in a close-up, until it had ended, which would, of course, have proved boring. The treatment was as follows.

The guide is seen in the long shot beginning his song, and then follow a series of beautiful shots accompanied by his voice, showing glimpses of the sky, panoramas of the scenery, close-ups of the ruins, a particular close-up of a goddess, followed by the profile of his beautiful listener, and, as his song ends, back to the guide.

Again, when he sings in a crowded drawing-room, we see him when he begins, and, thereafter, his voice accompanies a *slow* "panning" shot in which the camera travels up the room, revealing his audience. Individual reaction to his beautiful voice is captured. The last figure on which the camera rests is the heroine, leaning against the wall listening, and almost imperceptibly the camera, having "panned" from right to left up the room, now slowly approaches her until she is in close-up. Throughout the voice is heard, and as the last note is sung, we

see the singer again, and when he bows, we hear the applause, *but for some time do not see the applauders.* Few finer examples of the application of sound have been seen.

And now, by the courtesy of Gainsborough Pictures, I reproduce below extracts from the actual working scenario of their recent production *Michael and Mary*, from the play by A. A. Milne, in which Edna Best and Herbert Marshall play the leading roles. The pages quoted have been selected at random, and give an excellent idea of modern scenario construction. Firstly, the opening shots—

SEQUENCE A.

Sub-title: explaining that the date is 1899 and that the Boer War has just begun.

A1. TOP OF A DRESSING-TABLE.

It is a cheap hotel dressing-table, made less forbidding by feminine trinkets, brushes, ribbons, and so on.

Two hands, rough and masculine, enter the picture, place a sheet of paper on the dressing table, pick up a pencil, and begin to write.

A2. *Insert.*

A man's hand completes a letter—

"Your loving husband,
Harry Price."

A3. *Close-up.* HANDS.

The same rough hands pick up a lady's bag, empty its contents on to the dressing table—some small change, a sovereign purse, and a woman's marriage "lines." The hands open the "lines"—"Mary Weston, spinster; Harry Price, bachelor." They throw them aside out of the picture and pick up the sovereign purse, taking out about £6. Then the coins are swept off the dressing table.

At this moment the camera starts to truck back. We see that we are in the bedroom of a cheap hotel. The Venetian blinds are down and the light coming through the slats, fills the room with strange shadows. The owner of the pair of hands has his back towards the camera. He is a short, heavily-built man, whose actions seem to us to be sinister and threatening.

The next example from this script shows the method of portraying a series of dramatic events in the shortest possible time, which condenses the history of a lifetime, the Dissolve being introduced throughout: it will be seen that a series of short pictures are superimposed over the holding hands of Michael and Mary. Superimposing results in a scene or scenes being apparent on the screen simultaneously with another original scene. In the following case, the sequence begins with a picture of hands being held. These remain, and seemingly transparent images appear over them, mixing from one to the other, the sequence ending as it began, with the holding hands.

E50. *Close Shot.* MICHAEL AND MARY.

He is standing behind Mary at the sofa.

Michael : We've got a story to tell you. Perhaps I should have told you before (with a little smile), but you were too quick for me. Romo should have known what sort of a family she's marrying into.

E51. *Close Shot.* DAVID AND ROMO.

They listen with rapt attention. Romo is sitting in an armchair and David sits down on the floor by her feet.

E52. *Close Shot.* MICHAEL AND MARY.

He sits down on the sofa and takes Mary's hand.

Michael : I dare say we shall hold hands now and then as I tell the story. All through the story we have been holding hands.

E53. *Close-up.* MICHAEL.

Michael : It begins a long time ago, 1899 to be exact

E54. *Close-up.* THE JOINED HANDS OF MICHAEL AND MARY.

On this shot, the following shots are superimposed, each with its appropriate music—

- (a) The marching feet of the troops as they go away to the South African War.
- (b) The clerk's hands running through the silks in Mary's bag.
- (c) A well-composed group of mummies and Egyptian knick-knacks in the museum.
- (d) Michael's hands laying down his hat and cane on the museum bench.
- (e) Tullivant's battered shirt-front with the bill of fare protruding.
- (f) A rocket going up.
- (g) Hands playing a concertina.
- (h) A man's lips blowing out a "tickler."
- (i) Hoofs of a trotting cab horse.
- (j) The jet ornament of Mrs. Tullivant's throat, immobile and threatening.
- (k) Hands in front of an altar—Michael slips a ring on Mary's finger.
- (l) Two or three detail shots of foliage from the woodland glade.
- (m) Price's dead, rigid hand.
- (n) The hard, suspicious eyes of the foreman of the jury.
- (o) The eyes of the coroner, severe and threatening. The camera trucks forward on this scene until at last it fades out, leaving on the screen only the joined hands of Michael and Mary.

Michael : (off) . . . This is our story as it ended to-day.

Most big studios employ their own scenarists, whose methods vary considerably, though the same fundamental

laws apply to all, and, consequently, the contents of scripts are frequently set out very differently. Some scenarists leave a great deal to the imagination of the producer, others leave very little. Hectic conferences result in scripts being rewritten at the last moment. But, for our purpose, the above examples adequately explain the general principles of scenario writing.

Armed with our scenario, let us enter the studio, and obtain a fleeting glimpse of the complicated-looking instruments with which we shall become intimately acquainted in the next chapter.

That vast structure looking like an airship hangar is the studio. You might have guessed it, by the knots of "Supers" gathered in the vicinity. Supers are film artists employed for small parts and crowd scenes. Approaching the entrance we are confronted with terrifying warnings. "NO SMOKING." "NO ENTRY WHEN RED LIGHT IS BURNING." "SILENCE." "NO TALKING WHEN RED LIGHT IS BURNING." "KEEP OUT." These red lights are everywhere, and indicate that production is in progress within the mysterious depths.

Assuming the light is off, we enter the studio, and find ourselves on one of the Floors, for a studio (unless it is unusually small) possesses several Floors, each capable of accommodating a production Unit. The Floor we are on now is not being used. Perhaps yesterday the last scenes were shot, and now the set is being demolished. Armies of workmen are knocking down what, at first sight, appear to be beautiful sculptured frescoes. A massive marble staircase exposes its splintery inside. Blasé men are carrying huge pieces of classic carvings back to the

plaster shop as if they were feathers. As one passes we observe that the head of Homer is hollow. Recently, I saw them removing an old cobbled street. The cobbles were in portable squares of about 2 feet. Placed together they look remarkably realistic.

Be extremely careful to look on the floor, as you walk, or you will trip over the countless ropes lying carelessly about. These, of course, are cables for the lights.

The walls of the studio, you will notice, are carefully lined with sound-proof material, and all doors, beside being double, are lined and edged.

Round the extreme walls of many studios there is a gallery, high up. The Production manager obtains a comprehensive view of all the sets from here, and the electricians and camera-men use it as a means to climb on to the girders from which lights and cameras are suspended.

That curious little box suspended on what looks like a super fishing-rod is the microphone. The arm from which it hangs is fitted to a beautifully made stand on noiseless wheels. It can be moved in any direction, and swung higher or lower, without making a sound. It is always, of course, invisible to the cameras, as it hangs over the heads of the artists.

On the Floor above, there is, perhaps, a church set. Production is in progress. We creep in between shots. The star is sitting on the pulpit drinking tea. Studio hands in overalls, pullovers, or plus-fours, recline in the pews. In canvas-backed chairs, upon which their names are printed, sit the Director, his Floor Secretary, and possibly, the Camera-man. They are in serious debate. Supers with

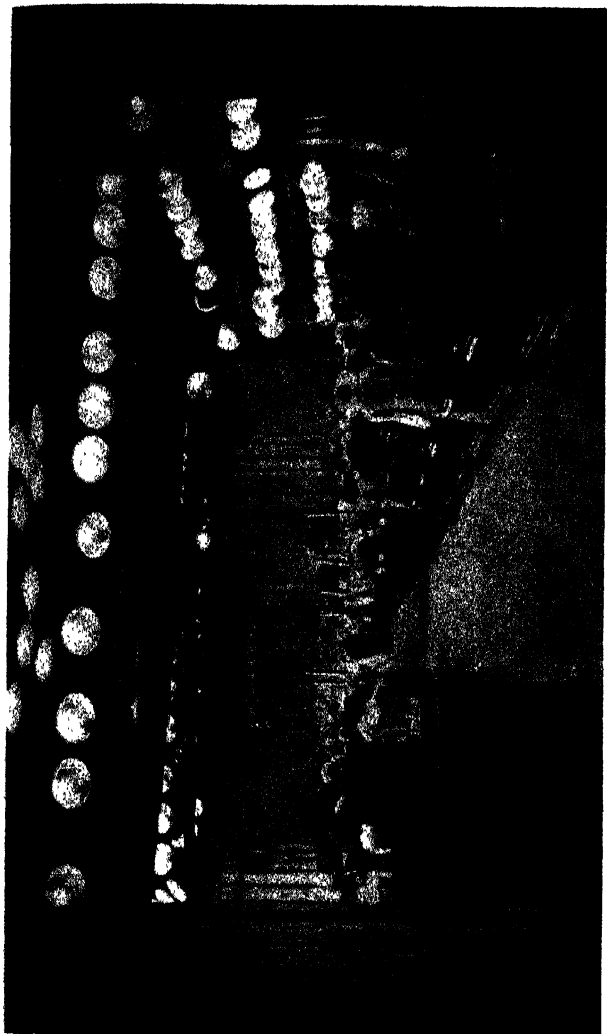


PLATE VIII

MORE LIGHTS THAN THERE ARE ON BROADWAY
More than 240 incandescent lamps were used to illuminate this church set
Radio Pictures

ochre countenances stare disinterestedly at us. The heat is intense. The church is most unusual. Shielding our eyes so that the upper part of it is invisible, we find it amazingly realistic, with worn pews, aisle carpet, altar steps, etc. But a closer inspection discloses the fact that the old Norman arches on either side are propped up with lashed poles, and that there is no vaulted roof, the walls ending abruptly about 15 ft. up, while over their tops appear the heads of electricians who gaze down at us. Batteries of lights are suspended above. More lights are concealed behind the pulpit.

A bell sounds! Magically, the lounging figures spring to life. The Director raises his hand, almost indifferently, but his eyes are searching the entire set. Every man is at his post, by lights, by cameras, by microphone. The Star resumes the position she has been taking up for the last three hours. This is going to be the fifteenth Retake. A silence has descended upon the studio, increasing the realistic atmosphere of the church set. "Are you ready, my dear?" asks the Director. The Star nods. "Remember, this time, to hesitate before leaving the pew." She nods again. Her dresser rushes forward and carefully dabs powder on her neck.

The chief Camera-man scrutinizes the lights, whilst his assistants, who operate the cameras, focus up again. The Camera-man in charge of a production does not operate the cameras, but devotes himself solely to arranging the lighting and camera angles—that is, the positions which the cameras will take up. If, for instance, three cameras are turning, near together, the lighting need not be altered for any of them. One may be taking a close-up



PLATE IX

TYPICAL STUDIO SET IN PRODUCTION, SHOWING MICROPHONE IN POSITION
(F.B.O.)

of part of the action, the second shooting from a low level, and the third taking a shot which is normal and dead on to the set, this camera having to "pan" and follow the figures when they move. If, however, it was necessary for one camera to shoot down on the scene from a height, it is probable that the lighting would have to be altered so that it accommodated both the "top shot" and also the two cameras shooting on the floor. If this was found impracticable, the "top shot" would be taken separately, after which the two remaining cameras would "turn" on the Set together. However, to resume our production, a boy rushes on to the set and holds up a Focus Board beside the Star. All the cameras focus up on this, which has a bold design of circles on it. "Focus O.K.!"

Gazing upwards, we perceive the face of a man staring down at us through a glass window high up in the wall of the Studio. He is the Recording Engineer, or Monitor, in his Soundproof Room. The Camera-man asks, quite quietly, "Ready—this is a Take?" He is obviously addressing the Recording Engineer, and more amazing still, that gentleman has heard his question, for he replies instantly, not by opening his glass window and shouting down, but by means of a buzzer, or through a "speaker" on the floor. Everything is then ready. The microphone hangs in its agreed position, the man responsible for it having rehearsed the movement it has to make when the heroine walks about. Frequently it is unnecessary to alter the microphone's position, unless a great deal of broad movement is to occur.

"SILENCE PLEASE. SHOOT!" Camera motors are switched on. They are, of course, noiseless. A boy runs



PLATE X
BUILDING A CABARET SET
Radio Pictures

forward with a pair of big wooden clappers, which he claps before the camera. Another boy holds up a blackboard on which is chalked the name of the production, the Sequence and Scene number, and the names of the Director and Camera-man. (Both the loud clap, which will register on the sound track, and the board, which is filmed, will indicate to the Cutters the scene which follows it. Without such preliminary particulars it would be impossible to assemble the hundreds of strips taken for a production.) Immediately after this, the action is played, and, unless a lamp bursts, or the film jams in the camera, or the characters falter, or the Sound-recording Engineer experiences any trouble, the "O.K." is sounded, and every one breathes freely again.

If you revisited the Studio during the following week, you would probably find the church in pieces, and, perhaps, the pews piled up against half a cocktail bar. The rapidity with which sets are demolished is in striking contrast to the care taken to erect them. This fascinating work finds its origin in the Art Department, which is peopled with artists, qualified architects, modellers, and a host of other brilliant people, devoting themselves to creating beautiful settings, which shall be appropriate and exact in every detail. Experts in period furniture and decoration are employed under this group, and rarely does the modern film contain those glaring errors so frequently noticed in early productions. Most sets are first designed on paper, and then models are built to scale. These are studied by all concerned, and experienced camera-men can work out the basis of their lighting with the aid of these miniature sets. When agreed upon,

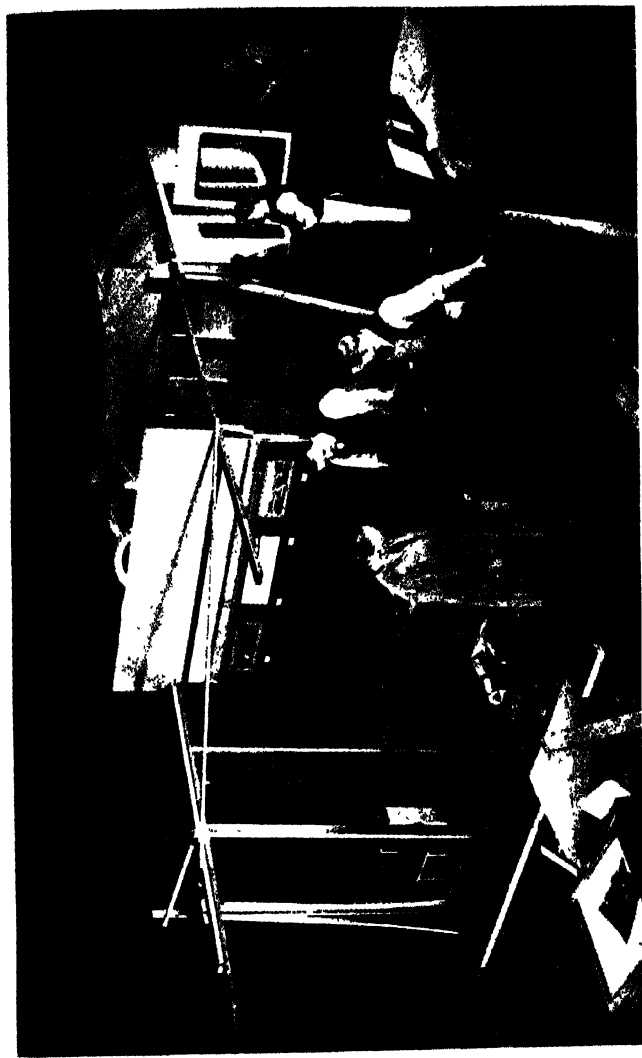


PLATE XI

ASSEMBLING A "CORNISH RIVIERA" COACH AT ISLINGTON STUDIOS FOR *The Ghost Train*
Gainsborough

they are passed to the workshops, where a staff of carpenters speedily erect full size replicas on the Studio Floors.

Allied to the work of the Art Department is Composite Photography, whereby pictorial illusions are created which only the experienced eye can detect on the screen. One invention is known as the Schüfftan Process, which enables two or more pictures to be exposed on separate sections of the image area of the film. For instance, a scene is to be shot representing the interior of Westminster Abbey, and it is desirable that the entire interior shall be shown, from roof to floor. It would be necessary to erect only the lower half of the Abbey in the Studio, up to a height of, say, 12 ft. A photograph of the upper half would then be placed on glass, and shot so that the base of the photograph and the top of the studio set would exactly meet, the resultant image being a complete interior of the Abbey. The free movement of the actors would be unaffected, all action taking place in the lower, and actual half, of the set. By similar methods, backgrounds are added to sets, and also to actual exteriors, which transform them to an unbelievable degree. For instance, a range of distant mountains can be added to an exterior which possesses an expanse of sky, by photographing a board upon which the range is painted, which is fixed so that its limits shall not overlap the actual sky exterior. And, most recent of all examples of Composite Photography is the Dunning process, invented by Mr. C. Dodge Dunning, and patented in the United States in 1927. This process is being used extensively by studios, and in addition to enabling directors to secure



PLATE XII
A FRENCH STREET CONSTRUCTED IN ENGLAND FOR THE FILMING OF *A Gentleman of Paris*
Gaumont British

extraordinary results, it is reducing production expenses. By this process it is possible to combine two images, each produced independently, with perfect results. For instance, a character can be made to appear standing in a street, whereas he was actually filmed in the studio, and the street might be one in any part of the world. Similarly, a girl can be shown opening a door through which a vast cabaret is seen, though she really opened a door in the studio opening on to a blank wall, and the cabaret was shot in an entirely different place.

This result is obtained by placing in the taking camera a coloured positive of the cabaret in contact with a new length of unexposed panchromatic negative, and photographing in the studio the girl opening the door, this part of the scene being lit with coloured light complementary to the print in the camera. When the resultant exposure is made upon the new negative, the two subjects merge perfectly, owing to the one being lit with the reverse or complementary colours to the other, and thus absorbing those rays which under normal lighting conditions would cause two subjects superimposed to form a ghost effect.

The above description will, perhaps, be easier to follow after the reader has studied the next chapter, and the references contained therein to cameras. From a technical point of view the Dunning process should come under the heading of Camera-work, but I have dealt with it here in view of the ultimate results of the process being supplementary to the work of the Art Department.

Should the reader desire a fuller description of the Dunning process, by the Inventor himself, he will find it in Volume XII, Number 36, of *Transactions of the*

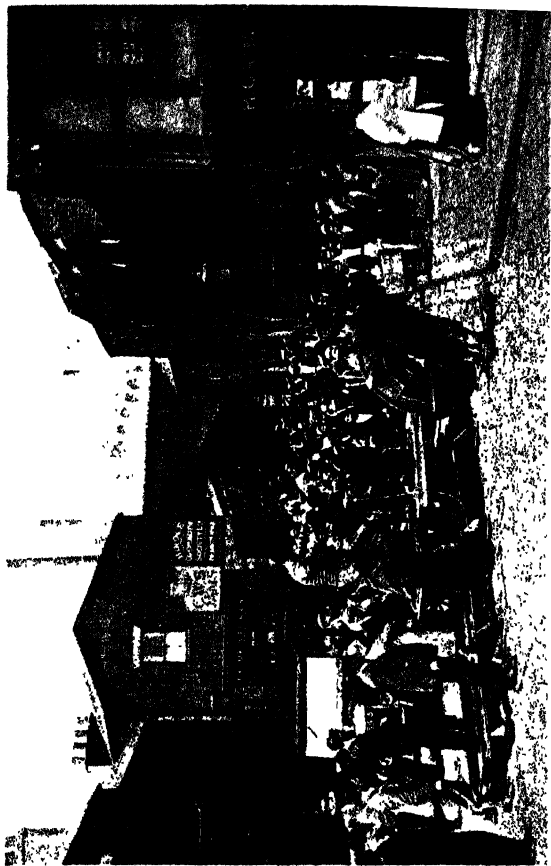


PLATE XIII

A SPECIALLY CONSTRUCTED STREET FOR *Hindle Wakes*

Note camera on movable truck. Victor Saville directing

Gainsborough

Society of Motion Picture Engineers, an American publication, procurable in this country.

But in the majority of sets the skill of the carpenters is employed, unassisted by the magic of Composite Photography. Recently, I saw two gigantic pillars, several feet in diameter, left standing in a corner, and, leaning against them, massive stone steps upside down. Closer inspection revealed the fact that the pillars were mere shells of plaster and wood, and that the stone steps were made of deal and grey paint. They had formed the entrance to the British Museum, a scene which had been shot the previous night. The result on the screen was so successful that even the British Museum door-keeper would swear it was the actual entrance. The steps were built down below the studio floor level into a "trap," and the pillars, which ended abruptly after about 15 ft., together with a length of iron railings, completed the picture.

In *Atlantic*, considerable ingenuity was employed to reproduce the interior of a mammoth liner. More ambitious still, many of the impressive scenes showing the sides of the sinking vessel were shot in a field in Elstree! Many of the other scenes were taken on board a real liner, and only the most practised eye could distinguish one from the other.

Both in American and British productions there are examples of entire streets erected in the studio. Chaplin's *City Lights* contains a number of studio exteriors, complete with traffic, and in *Hindle Wakes*, the Gainsborough production, are amazing reproductions of Lancashire's cobbled streets, factory gates, tiny shops, and so on.

Probably the question in the reader's mind is: Why are all these sets built up in studios at enormous expense, when the actual locations they represent are accessible? Is it on account of uncertain climatic conditions? To some extent, yes, particularly, of course, in this country. But that is not the chief reason. Whilst admitting that settings are expensive, it must be made clear that only in a studio can the photographic results be dependable, and the required effects obtained. Lancashire is accessible, but it is not possible to light an actual street to the same advantage as a reproduction of it can be lit in a studio. A row of real houses possesses four walls and awkward roofs, whilst its replica is a single wall of "flats" over the top of which can be fixed the lights. Portions of that row of houses can be separated for certain closer shots. To explain it in a nutshell, a set can be analysed and altered and lit with a consistency essential to camera-work.

The advantage of reproducing an *interior* setting is even more easily understood when it is learnt that the major proportion of studio lighting is overhead. Endeavour to light the room you are sitting in, and you will find the ceiling is in the way, that the walls join this white encumbrance, and that there are four of them! The same room is therefore reproduced in the studio. It has no ceiling. It has no fourth wall. Visualize it for a moment, and you will immediately realize the advantages from a photographic point of view.

We have now reached a point when it is necessary to consider the all-important art of LIGHTING.

Before the coming of Sound, arc lighting was

predominant in studios, but arcs sizzle, and the microphone picks up every sound it should not, frequently far more clearly than the sounds it should; therefore, arcs have practically vanished, incandescent lighting being mainly used on both sides of the Atlantic. For silent work, however, some producers prefer arc lighting, despite the fact that it has the disadvantage of requiring constant attention, the carbons having to be fed, and changed when they burn out (always, of course, at the wrong moment!) whereas incandescent lights require no attention whatever, and are silent. They can also be made to create a softer, more even light than arcs, which, unless handled with complete understanding, produce hard effects and make shadows a formidable problem.

The most usual method of lighting a set is to "flood" it, flood-lights forming the foundation, creating flat illumination, and "spots" (spotlights) giving emphasis to people or objects in the set. Then there are "banks" of lights, suspended from the roof, to aid the floods, and "suns"—huge circular lamps, throwing dazzling beams.

In the studio of to-day, the camera-man is entirely responsible for lighting a production, and a team of electricians carry out his instructions. He not only understands the art of lighting, but invariably possesses a sound knowledge of the various capabilities of lights. Though not primarily an electrician, he is a better man if he knows all about volts, amperes, and ohms, but in case the reader does not possess the same knowledge, it will make the subject clearer by mentioning that a *volt* is the unit of pressure, and the *ampere* the unit of current. *Ohms*, which I once thought stood only for "On His

Majesty's Service," are the units of resistance. *Watts*, of course, are the power.

Mr. Leslie Rowson, whose excellent camera work has been seen in several British productions, notably to date in *The Man They Couldn't Arrest*, *The Ghost Train*, and *Michael and Mary*, gives the following information in a paper on lighting conditions in Hollywood at the present time—

This is now mainly incandescent, a type of illuminant rich in red and yellow, and somewhat deficient in blue rays. With an open lens the colour correction is, roughly, equivalent to that obtained by working in daylight with a Wratten K.1 filter, which is really very satisfactory for general purposes.

Most of the lamps used nowadays are capable of focusing, and generally employ a 3 or 5 kW bulb, with either a parabolic, slightly roughened, or dispensing mirror, the last-named being the most useful on the floor, and the first two being generally employed on the spot-rail, where the light may have to be projected a considerable distance. The plain parabolic mirror is not, however, very satisfactory with incandescent lighting, owing to its tendency to throw an image of the filament; it is, however, the type usually employed in Hollywood.

Very few of the film-going public ever think about the art of lighting, yet, as we shall see, it is one of the most difficult branches of film production.

A set stands before us, ready to be lit in a straightforward way—that is, special effects are neither necessary nor advisable. We begin by placing one lamp facing the scene. Immediately, a shadow appears. We place another lamp in various positions until we have "killed" the shadow, only to find that we have far too much light on that portion of the set. A bank of lamps overhead, placed at an angle so that they will throw down light from the

front, are switched on, and though a smoothing-out effect is obtained, the furniture appears to have flattened itself against the wall-paper. Along the tops of both "walls" large circular lamps are fixed. These have mirror backs which, as Mr. Rowson states above, are capable of being focused. They are turned on simultaneously, and increase the dazzling illumination of the set. The heroine takes up her position. Her figure must be made stereoscopic. At present she is flattened out with the rest of the scene, and on the screen would merge into the background. What is to be done? "Spots!" Powerful spotlights, one or two, are placed behind her, invisible to the cameras. At first they shed thin, narrow beams of light. "Flood them," is cried out, and the electricians turn projecting arms in the spotlights which move the giant bulbs backward or forward, until the narrow beam has widened and enveloped the figure on which it is concentrating. This is the principle of back lighting, without which no figure can be "brought away," or made to stand out from the background.

A close-up is to be made of the heroine. She stands or sits from four to eight feet away from the camera. One or two lamps are placed beside the camera, parallel with the lens, or, perhaps, a lamp is fixed to a truck on which the camera is standing so that it moves with it, evenly lighting the object being shot. A "spot" is brought close behind her head, its beam tipping her hair with gold, and creating beautiful high lights around her profile. Remove the front lighting for a moment, and a magical silhouette is the result. Interesting as an experiment, but not suitable photography. Replace the camera lights

and she is adequately lit back and front. Is she, though? Balance of lighting must be studied, or uneven results will be obtained, necessitating a Retake. However beautiful the result created by the back lighting, the front lighting may be too hard, and if the lamps are too near her face, it certainly will be. "Diffusers" are therefore required. These are frames of silk, or opalescent glass which are fitted in front of the lamps. They soften the rays and cast a soft illumination over the features. Everything is now set for the close-up. But the cameraman, on checking up the set through his camera, finds certain rays need shading from the lens. "Two niggers!" Niggers are long, black boards which are stood at the sides of lamps to "nigger" off rays and glare.

The size of "inkies," the nickname by which incandescent lamps are affectionately known in the studio, cannot, perhaps, be gauged from the foregoing remarks. Imagine, therefore, an electric light bulb bigger than the most swollen human head, and consuming six horse-power of electricity, and some idea of their enormous size will be realized. Some filaments are as thick as one's finger and reach a temperature far greater than that needed to melt steel.

The current required for these enormous lamps, which range from 3,000 to 10,000 watts, cannot be switched on in the same way as household lights can, or the lamps would explode, and throw the studio into darkness. Instead, they must be fed gradually, through long lengths of cables. In very big sets, over 20,000 amperes are used at once—enough power to drive several locomotives.

Few lighting experts would agree on the method of

lighting any particular set. Straight lighting is most generally adopted, but the "Effects school" introduce many weird ideas, some resulting in extremely artistic pictures, others in hopelessly under-lit scenes.

Arc lights, however, continue to be used when silent scenes are being shot—and there are always a number of such sequences necessary in a production, particularly on exteriors and locations away from the studio. They are also used extensively to light factories, when silent industrial subjects are being produced which will appear accompanied by a running commentary to be added later. For this purpose Broad-sides are mainly used, which are powerful lamps burning four carbons side by side. Lighting factories, houses, and actual locations usually necessitates the use of a generator on a lorry, to supply the power, which makes an infernal din, and stands in the street, rather like the van supplying power to vacuum cleaners.

Certain instances in Sound production, however, make it possible to utilize generators. They were used, for instance, on some of the exteriors of *The Ghost Train*, which were shot at a country railway station. The generators were removed as far away as possible, extra cables being necessary to connect them to the lights, and the noise was hardly noticeable in the open air, particularly as the subject being filmed was a train, which drowned all else.

When time permits of a little experimenting, delightful results are obtained by what the less imaginative school would condemn as "stunt lighting." Recently I reproduced the workshop of an old violin-maker.

It was a subject offering considerable scope, both for lighting and camera-work. When it was all set, with fiddles lying carelessly around and old prints hung sideways on the three flats which represented his room, and the violin-maker himself was seated at his bench, we began to light it. All the top lights were turned on, and the result was "flat." To remedy this, we brought up three floods in a line with the camera, only to increase the brilliant hardness. No violin-maker's workshop ever presented such a dazzling sight, and the general effect was entirely wrong! We turned off the Tops, leaving only the Floods. That was better, and interesting shadows appeared on the walls. But we were far from satisfied. The picturesque figure wearing the little black skullcap did not stand away from the background, and the "candle-lit" workshop effect had not been captured at all. Accordingly, we turned off all lights, and then introduced two Spots only, one lighting the back of him, and throwing his profile into relief, the other concentrating on his bench, but sufficiently flooded to illuminate faintly his surroundings. No direct light, however, was on the background. The effect was magical. With two Spots, the workshop looked "real." Personally, I am in favour of this type of lighting, and, except in the case of big sets demanding the maximum amount of lighting, I would work with a minimum of lights, and hardly any top lighting. As I have previously stated, however, every set demands different lighting, and no hard and fast rules can be laid down.

It will have been noted from the extract quoted from Mr. Leslie Rowson's paper that modern incandescent

lamps are "rich in red and yellow. . . ." This leads us to the interesting subject of Colour, for about 60 per cent of the light of "inkies" is red, and it is just as disastrous to wave a red rag to a camera as to a bull, for red photographs as black. Incandescent lights, therefore, would appear to be useless, and they certainly would have been had not a magical film stock been invented known as Panchromatic film, which possesses increased sensitivity to the red component rays of light, and registers red correctly. Panchromatic stock has lessened, if not solved, the problem of colour values on the screen, and its sensitivity enables it to *suggest* colours. You will observe I say suggest, and not reproduce, and if Actinism is studied in relation to the screen it will be realized that to suggest colours is the function of the film—unnatural "natural colour" photography minimizing dramatic effect. For instance, is it not quite extraordinary that in all the films one sees nowadays colour is not missed, though the film is black and white? Recall those sumptuous drawing-rooms (all of them with dimensions equal to the Albert Hall, though occupied only by an unhappily married couple!) The walls were neutral and adorned with modernist panels. The curtains were, perhaps, silver-grey. The chairs gold. You knew they were gold, though on the screen they were not the *colour* of gold. The heroine was either a blonde or a brunette. Her frock was black, adorned with silver flowers. No colours, yet full of colours. Studies in monochrome—tones of black, grey, cream, and white, yet composed of a variety of photographic colours all harmonizing, and creating contrasts one with another. If you were able to look at the actual sets in a

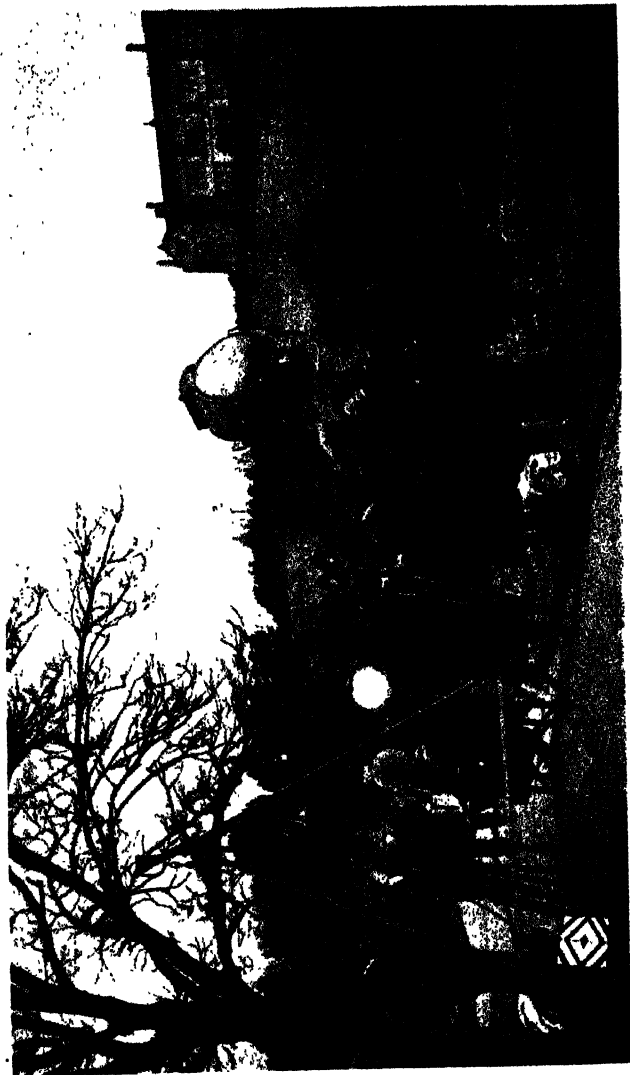


PLATE XIV

AN INSTANCE WHERE ARTIFICIAL LIGHTING WAS USED ON AN EXTERIOR, IN *The Hound of the Baskervilles*
Geistborough

studio you would find many of them were grey, for grey is one of the best photographic colours. Equally valuable is brown in all its many shades, including its rich relation orange, and lighter still until yellow is reached. Yellow in several shades is the basis of film make-up. Both blue and violet have actinic value, the former photographing as white, and certain tones of the latter as grey. Pure white, unless carefully lit, is a difficult "colour," cream producing less hard effects. Some greens photograph as a grey so dark as to appear almost black. Therefore, it will be realized how difficult is the work of creating a set, and dressing those to appear in it, to obtain the best camera results. To safeguard against any detail spoiling the complete scene, light tests are made, which are quickly developed, printed, and viewed before production begins. Colours may be perfect, but lighting incorrect, or *vice versa*. And so only by proceeding with the utmost care and caution is the perfect production obtained.

And what of the sun? This, the greatest of all lights, requires careful handling! Naturally, in England, exteriors depending upon sunlight have had to be reduced to a minimum owing to the unreliability of the weather, but assuming that the sun is shining, the same caution has to be observed as with studio lamps, and the artists' make-up modified or increased according to the results of tests, made whenever possible, in order that faces shall not appear in any way different when Interiors and Exteriors follow each other on the screen. The use of Reflectors on Exterior work is interesting. These are fairly large boards, usually two hinged together, painted with aluminium, or covered with smooth silver paper or

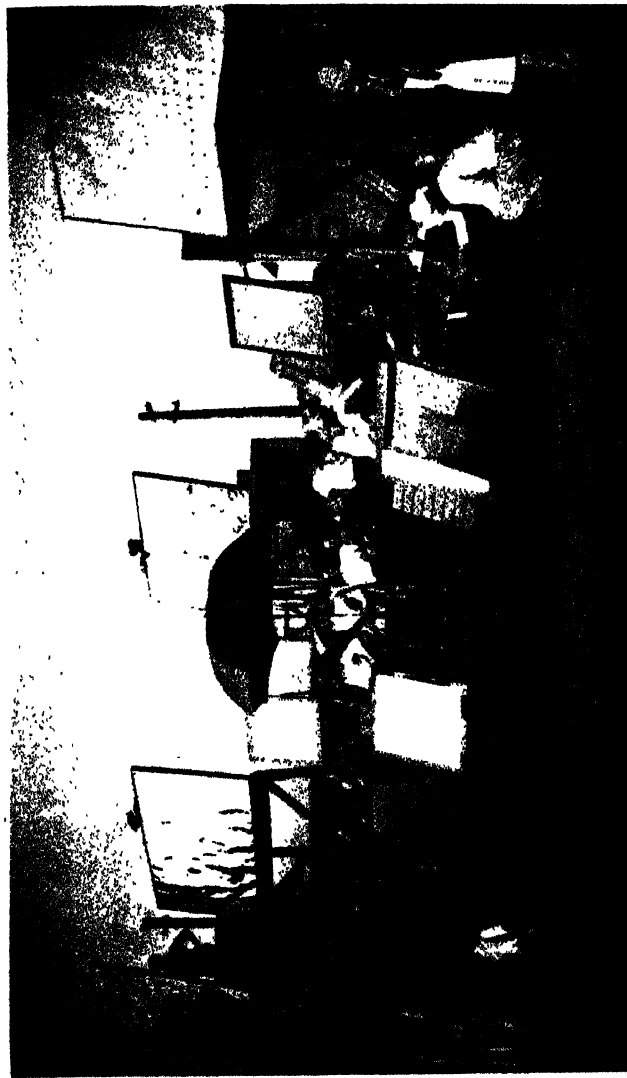


PLATE XV
LIGHTING UP A STREET SCENE IN Cimarron, BY MEANS OF SUN REFLECTORS
Radio Pictures

metal. They are used to reflect the sun's rays on to faces or objects on the set—natural spotlights, very similar in application to the aggravating game of catching the sun in a mirror and turning it on to the eyes of a sleeping person. By the use of reflectors, emphasis is given to features without any apparent "lighting." An elaboration of this method is the use of actual studio lamps on exteriors to supplement the rays of the sun, or rather, to pick out whoever or whatever demands emphasis. It is surprising that studio lamps in brilliant sunshine should offer increased light, for to the eye they have lost their brilliance, just like the lamps of a car turned on in daylight.

And now that we have a working knowledge of studio lighting and photographic colours, we cannot learn any more about this mysterious art until we enter the studio. Remember, whilst production is in progress there must be no noise of any sort. To sneeze is sheer suicide!

CHAPTER VI

PRODUCING A SOUND FILM

THE Microphone—The Amplifier—Recording—Exterior Sound production—Sound trucks — Cameras—Post-synchronization—Effects—*Indirect Sound*—The Art of Cutting, or Producing with Scissors

Now we are in the midst of it—on the spot where Microphone Magic is practised, apparently by hundreds of magicians, for as far as the eye can see, the studio floor is crowded with people—the most cosmopolitan assembly in the world, amazingly indifferent to the electrical wonders surrounding them. The voices of artists, and the music of orchestras, are going to constitute the Sound.

Sound! Let us study this phenomenon which has existed since life began, but which has taken on a new aspect since *The Singing Fool* set the ball, or rather the bawl, rolling.

It will not be found so complicated after all, when analysed, and the component parts of a studio's recording apparatus are studied separately.

In the first place, *Sound*, as most people know, is a series of vibrations, or sound waves. The perfect and familiar analogy is the stone thrown into water, causing a disturbance and throwing out circular ripples or waves, which are ever expanding. Similarly, sound waves, when thrown out, cause a disturbance in the ether. But there is a fundamental difference between the material waves caused by the stone in the water, and the invisible vibrations in the ether, for the sound waves, also ever

expanding, *are thrown out in every direction*. Liken the ripples on the water to rubber bands, and the invisible ripples in the ether to countless rubber bands forming a ball, and the difference becomes apparent.

The first instrument with which one becomes acquainted in the studio is the Microphone (which shall *not* hereinafter be called the Mike!) It is best described as an iron ear, and though possessing seemingly magical powers, is by no means so marvellous as the human ear, for the simple reason that it does not possess the power of selectivity.

What is selectivity? It is the ability to select those sounds which one desires to hear, and to reject or reduce those which interfere with the reception of them. For example, if one is talking to a friend in a busy street, countless conflicting sounds are entering that friend's ears, but he is *selecting* the voice to which he is listening, and throwing the others "out of focus," with the result that he is able to hear above the roar of the traffic, which his ears have reduced in volume. If, however, he had a microphone on each side of his head instead of ears, he would probably lose his reason by the deafening sounds ringing through his brain, for being dispossessed of the power of selectivity, his robot ear-drums would record the actual volume of every sound, and the voice of the speaker would be drowned in the roar of engines. It will therefore be realized that the microphone's limitations present many problems to recording engineers, who, as we shall see, introduce the human factor to create that little-realized power we are practising every minute of our days—Selectivity.

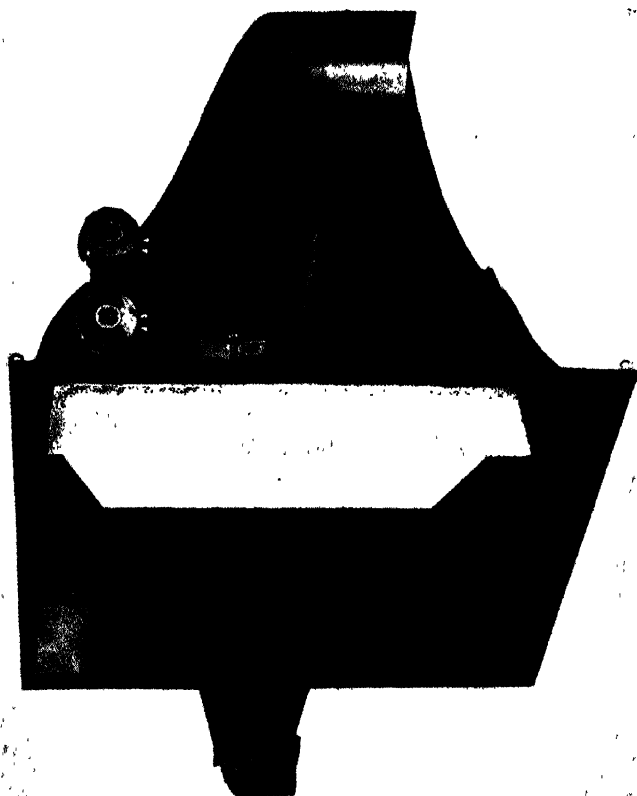


PLATE XVI

AN ELECTRIC HORN FOR INSTALLATION BEHIND A CINEMA
SCREEN

Western Electric

It is, therefore, understood that the microphone is a collector of sound waves, and just what happens is that waves or vibrations hit against the microphone's diaphragm, causing it to vibrate at exactly the same speed as the waves hit it. These impulses (or flow of frequencies) are transferred by wires from the microphone, as *electrical* impulses, to an amplifier, which is in reality a glorified wireless set. This instrument enlarges or magnifies them, and again they are carried to the recording instrument, and change into fluctuations of light, which I shall explain in a moment.

I have just likened the amplifier to a wireless set, and must add that it contains a series of amplifying valves which amplify very weak electrical currents, in some cases several million times, in order to strengthen those currents sufficiently to cause the necessary fluctuations of light.

There are a number of sound systems in operation and, consequently, the apparatus varies in minor details, but in most of them both the amplifier and the recording instrument are together in the sound-proof Monitor's or Recording Engineer's room, above the studio, to which the microphone is wired up.

The recording instrument is, to all intents and purposes, a film camera, without any lens, which photographs sound instead of pictures. It contains a roll of film just as an ordinary camera does, and it is in this wonderful machine that the miracle occurs, in which light fluctuations play the principal part. There is, inside, a light globe of special internal construction, which is made to respond readily to the fluctuations of current which are led to it from the amplifier, creating fluctuations which



PLATE XVII

PROJECTION ROOM OF THE TROCADERO THEATRE, ELEPHANT AND CASTLE, LONDON
Western Electric

are photographed through an optical slit on to the film. As the light fluctuates, the sensitive emulsion of the film is exposed either more or less. This film negative is developed and printed in the same way as picture negatives are treated, but instead of the result being in terms of moving images, it is a record running down the whole length of the film, of all the fluctuations that occurred in the lamp, which are a more or less correct rendering, in photographic form, of the original sound waves created by speech or music. This is known as the Sound Track, and it occupies one-tenth of an inch of width on the film. The visible shape or image of the sound appears either in the form of variations of density, appearing as bars right across the track, ranging from deep black to clear white, or in the form of variable area, best exemplified by comparing the shapes with the teeth of a saw perpendicularly, the height of the teeth and the depth of the valleys between depending on the strength or the weakness of the fluctuations.

The next stage is to ascertain how the above operations create the final result on the screen, when the images are both seen and heard. This is what happens: whilst the recording instrument was recording the speech by the fluctuating light, the picture cameras were capturing the visual images of the speakers in the studio, and both instruments, sound and picture, were turning at exactly the same speed—so that perfect synchronization is the result. That speed is at the rate of twenty-four pictures per second, and it is for this reason that both sound and picture cameras are motor driven, as no human hand could turn consistently and exactly at such a high speed, which

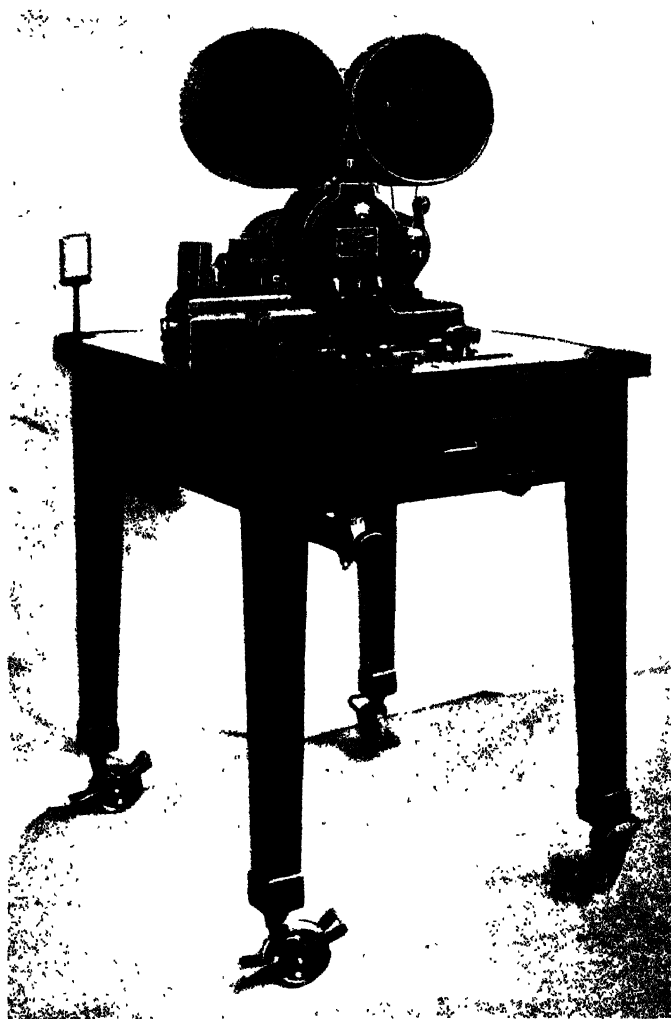


PLATE XVIII
THE NEWEST TYPE OF RECORDING INSTRUMENT
• *R.C.A. Photophone*

is a very different task to the original work of the cameraman in "silent" days, when he had to turn the handle at the rate of only sixteen pictures per second. There is an important reason why the above increase in speed is necessary when shooting sound films, which is, to obtain sufficient length of film to make possible the record of the consonants in speech, which are very high frequency vibrations; sixteen pictures per second would be inadequate, resulting in the consonants being slurred.

Assuming that a scene has been shot, and the corresponding sound recorded, the contents of both cameras (or rather of the camera and the recorder) are developed as all photographs are developed, with the result that two negatives are obtained, one of the visual action, and the other of the sound or dialogue of that action. The picture camera began the sequence by taking pictorially the clappers, and the image of the loud report they made was recorded. It therefore follows that if both negatives are printed together, the result will be a positive of the picture, with the sound track running down its left side, thus synchronizing perfectly.

It is this double print that is projected in the cinema which is the second part of the miracle. When projectors showed silent films they turned at the speed at which those films had been photographed—sixteen pictures per second. The modern talking picture projector must necessarily project at the increased speed of twenty-four pictures per second; on this machine is a special attachment resulting in the sound track passing by an optical slit, and behind the sound track is a lamp known as an Exciter Lamp, focused so that the track intercepts its rays in

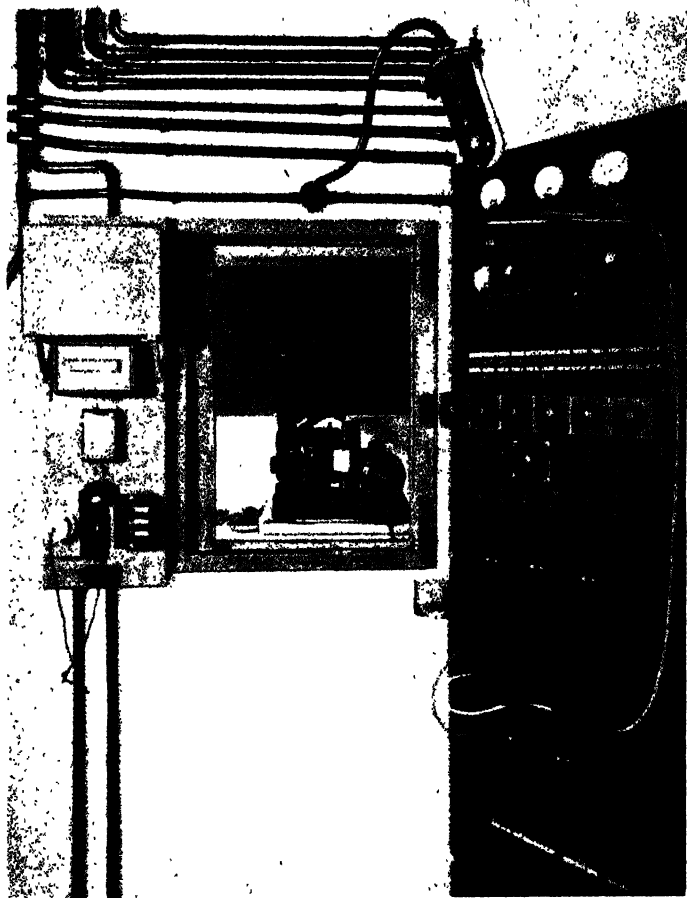


PLATE XIX

A TYPICAL RECORDING ROOM, SHOWING THE AMPLIFIER IN
FOREGROUND, AND RECORDER IN ROOM BEYOND

R.C.A. Photophone

varying degrees as it travels past the slit, which corresponds to that through which the original fluctuations were photographed. These fluctuations are thus recreated, and are thrown on to a photo-electric cell which transforms these light variations back again into electric impulses which are, in turn, led to the diaphragms of loud speakers behind the screen, causing them to vibrate, thus setting up sound waves in the cinema which reach the ear as recognizable speech.

Now a word about the recording engineer's responsible duties. Apart from controlling the recording equipment, he has before him a board on which is a set of dials, each dial controlling the volume of sound from one microphone. This is the Volume Control Board, and the art practised upon it is known as Mixing.

Doubtless the reader has listened to the broadcasting of plays in which music and voice are being transmitted simultaneously. Gradually the music has changed, or the voice has faded away, or one or the other has become louder. That is the result of mixing the sounds on the recorder's control board. The same principle applies to film-recording, and upon the engineer's ability to mix perfectly depends the success of the production on the screen. For instance, a band may be playing normally, but the volume coming through from the microphone may be too great. Dial manipulation can reduce it, or, alternatively, increase or amplify it, to an unbelievable degree. The various instruments in a band can be "separated"—brass reduced in volume, strings increased, and so on. Voices, of course, require considerable attention, and tones can be altered to such an extent that the

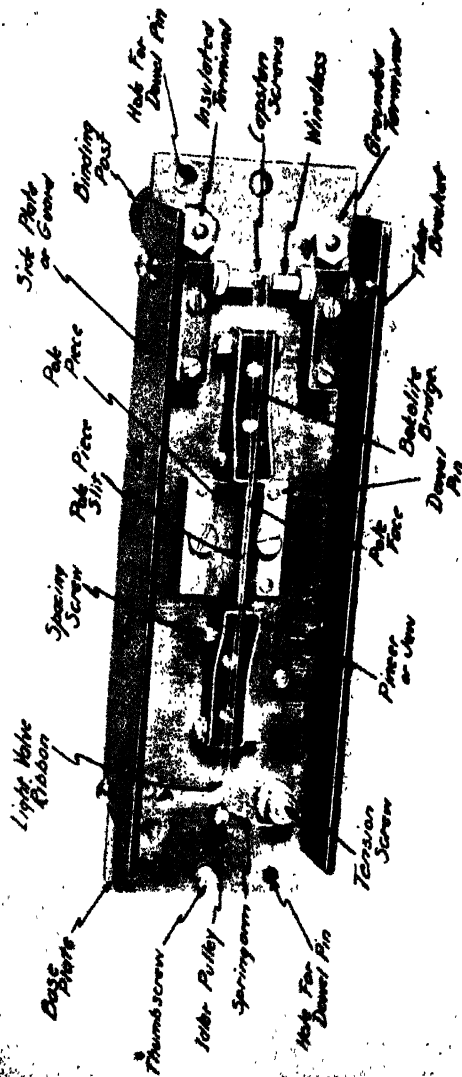


PLATE XX
A LIGHT VALVE
Western Electric

speaker is unable to recognize his own voice when it is projected in a theatre. Sounds occurring simultaneously require delicate balancing, for one must not drown the other. On some occasions, music must form only a background for speech; on others, it must predominate.

It is the recording engineer who suddenly stops production because the microphone is picking up sounds of which the cast is ignorant, such as the rustle of the heroine's dress. Any one of a thousand natural sounds can spoil a scene, if the recording engineer does not eliminate or reduce it. Briefly, he is adding the power of selectivity to non-selective instruments, and creating, by mechanical means, what the human ear accomplishes naturally.

The method adopted for sound recording on exteriors is similar, except that "Sound Trucks" (in reality, large lorries) are driven to the location, and the instruments they contain set up. These trucks are fitted with complete recording apparatus, and an adequate supply of cabling to enable the microphone to be moved about as freely as possible. Conditions of working are, naturally, very different, as no attempt can be made to obtain the utter silence of the studio, nor is such silence desirable. Care has always to be taken, however, that the countless noises of the locality do not materially interfere with the dialogue and sounds which it is essential should be picked up. The mixing panel, properly handled, should produce the required result of toning down all natural sounds to form a background only to the sounds created in the actual scene.

Cameras, which now demand our attention, remind me

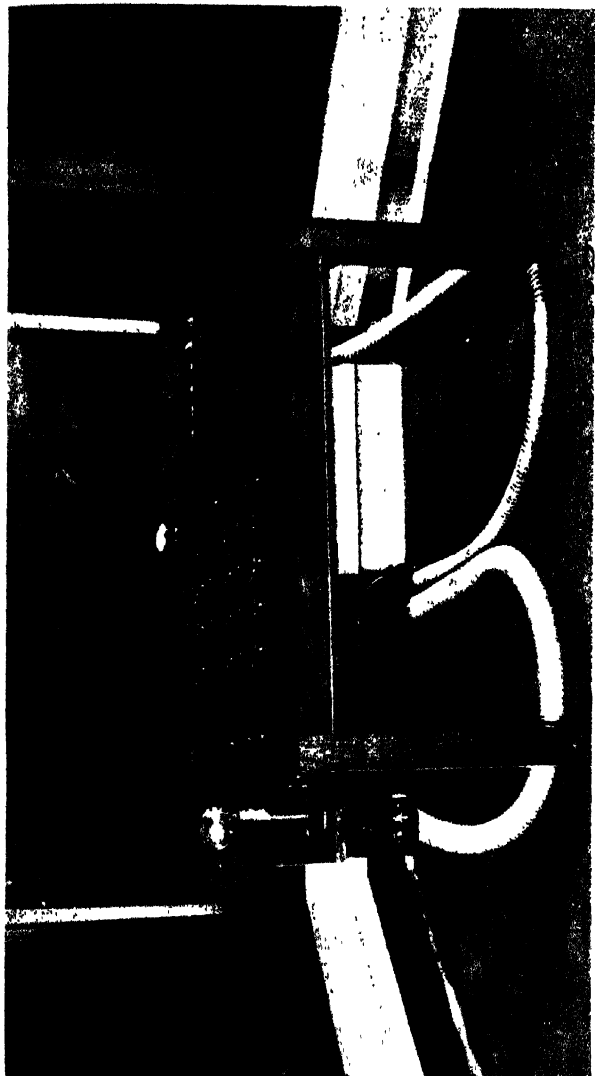


PLATE XXI
A RECORDER'S MIXING PANEL
Western Electric

of a question I heard asked in a studio recently. A visitor wanted to know who had the greatest amount of responsibility in a film production, and who was the man upon whom the success or failure of the film really depended. The answer was "All of them!"

After acquaintance with all the important departments, each carrying out work of an entirely different nature, but all interrelated, one realizes that it is impossible to decide which bears the most responsibility, for beautiful settings are of little use if badly photographed, and brilliant actors are valueless if recorded indifferently. Good recording cannot hide crude direction, and the finest photography can be utterly spoilt by bad development of the negative. Consequently, only the finest teamwork and most perfect organization can result in successful production, the efforts of each person concerned depending upon the efficiency of every other.

Before the arrival of sound, and all its attendant instruments, authority was shared by Director and Camera-man. Now the Recorder shares the honours, and although supreme authority is held by the Director of a production, he is primarily concerned with dramatic development, leaving the technicalities of the production to the Camera-man and Recording Staff.

In introducing the camera, we should first learn a little about the commodity known as film stock, with which it is loaded. Virgin negative film, supplied in sealed circular tins, is known as raw stock. Cameras engaged on silent production are loaded with rolls of negative film 400 ft. in length, but most sound productions are shot with cameras possessing magazines which hold

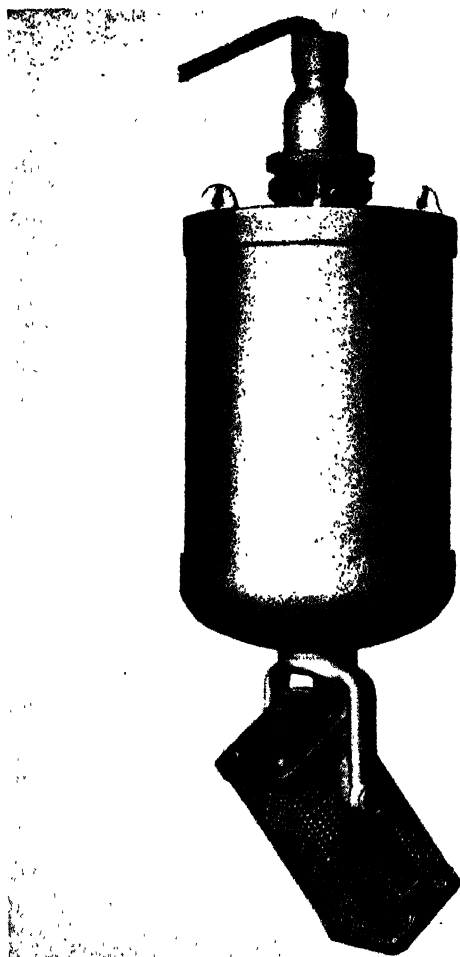


PLATE XXII

THE RIBBON MICROPHONE IS THE LATEST TYPE DEVELOPED
BY R.C.A.

R.C.A. Photophone

1,000 ft. each. The reason, of course, is that in sound films not only are the individual shots longer in time, and therefore in footage, but there is the necessary length wasted while the motors work up to the required speed, and also the length, at both the beginning and end, for Clappers, or whatever form of sound mark is employed. Standard film stock is 35 mm. wide. The film used in the amateur cameras and projectors is 16 mm. wide, a baby ribbon in comparison with the full size stock. The actual picture, excluding the track, in the film frame is 23 mm. by 17 mm. Most people are familiar with the holes or perforations running down each side of a piece of film. These are made to fit the sprockets in both cameras and projectors. The emulsion side of the film, which is the sensitive side, has a dull surface, whilst the reverse, which is known as the base of the film, possesses a shiny surface. Despite the similarity of treatment of cinematograph films to that of the photographic films which nearly every one buys, there is a remarkably large number of people who imagine that the film they see on the screen is the actual copy produced in the studio and that it is the only one in existence. How they account for the same picture being in the programme of cinemas all over the metropolis simultaneously I am unable to say, unless they think, as a lady once explained to me, that messengers carry the copy from one hall to another and back again!

Naturally, positive prints of a production are taken from the master negative, "first run" bookings and "pre-releases" being worked with new copies, and less important dates with copies which have received some degree of wear. All film-renting companies possess repairing

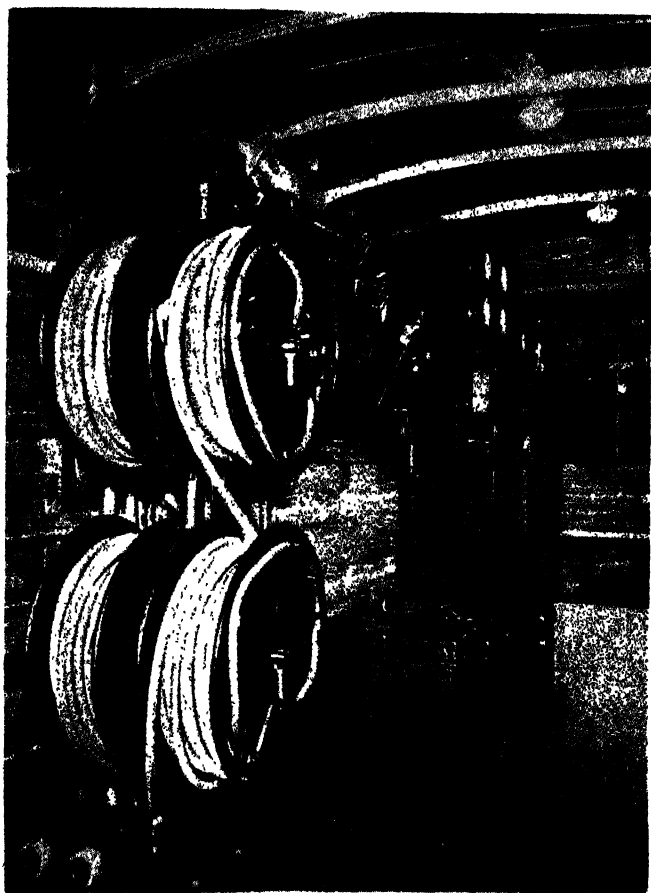


PLATE XXIII

INTERIOR OF A SOUND TRUCK, USED FOR RECORDING
SOUND ON LOCATIONS

R.C.A. Photophone

staffs, which are solely employed in repairing the copies as they come back from bookings. In the days of silent films, attention was necessary only for the physical condition of the print, in such details as repairing torn sprocket holes, and cutting out badly scratched sections, but with sound prints the work has become more difficult, and a track that has become damaged through careless projection, or worn with time, is beyond repair.

Assume we have a tin of panchromatic negative film, and that our task is to load the camera with it. For this purpose we retire to the dark-room, which is lit by a *green* lamp (for red light fogs panchromatic stock), and take with us a magazine box, which is a metal case with a velvet interior. This takes the roll of film, and a slit permits one end to project. The magazine is then closed, and in daylight is fitted into the camera, and the film threaded through the sprockets, round the front of the camera, past the "gate" which is the size of one frame, and through to the receiving magazine box, which will receive the film as it is turned. This latter box is the one which is finally removed from the camera, its contents being unloaded, tinned, and sent, sealed, to the laboratory where it is developed and printed.

There are many celebrated makes of cameras, but among the most famous are the Bell & Howell, the Debie, the Mitchell and the new continental Cinephone. The mechanism of these cameras varies to a great extent, but a camera-man acquainted with any one can be relied upon to master quickly any other, the fundamentals being the same.

One and all depend upon the shutter, a disc before the

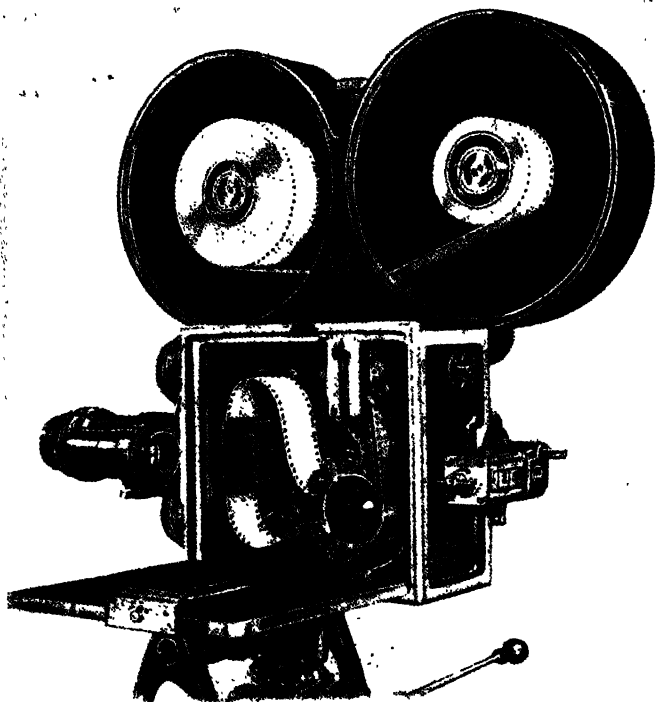


PLATE XXIV

CAMERA AND MAGAZINE INTERIORS EXPOSING FILM MOVEMENT
MECHANISM AND THREADING OF FILM

Bell & Howell

film, containing an aperture which, as it passes before the film, allows light to fall on it. And while the blade of the shutter is preventing light from falling on the film, the frame is wound away. A new camera has made its appearance in Hollywood which does away with the shutter and intermittent mechanism entirely. It is quite silent, runs continuously (i.e. does not stop and start), and gives the negative about sixty per cent more exposure than any shutter camera. This allows less light to be used, and is generally beneficial. The camera is called the Moreno-Snyder.

To make a fade-out the shutter is closed whilst the camera is being turned, while to open it slowly is to create the fade-in. The dissolves and mixes mentioned previously are made by first creating a fade-in for, say, nine turns, and then turning back (turning the handle backwards) for the same number of turns. The camera is then set on the other scene which is to be dissolved in, and turning begins again. Thus the two exposures are on the same length of film, and if the turns have been counted correctly, both exposures must be even. To superimpose one image over another, the first is shot for the desired length, say, fifteen feet, and the camera is turned back to that extent. The next scene is shot on the same section of negative—thus both scenes appear simultaneously on the screen. The superimposed shot is, therefore, achieved by a prolonged dissolve, the difference being that the first image does not ultimately fade out and leave the second alone on the screen. It will be realized that the indiscriminate introduction of mixes in the scenario will only result in disappointment for the

scenarist unless he has thought out the practicability of his stipulations, for he may (and has been known to) plan that, for instance, the interior of a room shall mix into the exterior of a house, disregarding the fact that the exterior will, in all probability, not be shot until perhaps three months after the interior. This entails removing that particular piece of film from the camera, adequately marked so that it can be loaded again exactly in the same position, and keeping it tinned until the exterior is taken. An alternative is for the laboratory to make what is known as a chemical mix, by overlapping the negatives of the unmixed interior and exterior, but the best solution is to mix only those scenes which occur consecutively.

Acquaintance with ordinary still photography enables one to understand the film camera more quickly, for the stop closing the iris in the lens plays an extremely important part in both. Under the lighting conditions of the average studio, the lens is worked at full aperture, but on exterior work it has to be regulated according to conditions, subject-matter, and time of the year. The outfit of a well-equipped camera-man includes from eight to fifteen lenses. The 2-inch lens is most generally used for shots which are moderately near, and the 3-inch for close-ups. The wide-angle lens (one inch and three-eighths) embraces more of the scene than the others, and is invaluable where studio space does not permit comprehensive long shots to be taken.

By changing the lens and not moving the camera, a medium shot can be altered to a close-up. Nature studies of birds seen in close-ups never cease to create wonder as to how the camera-man could be so near and yet

remained unobserved. A 12-inch lens is probably the explanation, many yards having separated the camera-man from his feathered friends. Raging lions prancing about apparently within a few feet of the camera may have been "shot" with a 6-inch lens, and, moreover, the camera was probably driven by mechanical means, the camera-man being quite safe, yards away.

And now a glimpse at that all-important, though rather overlooked, article upon which the camera rests—the tripod. The reader has possibly watched on the screen a dancer moving rapidly from side to side. Has he realized how remarkable it is that the figure is never out of sight? In whatever direction she darts, the camera follows her easily and smoothly. Galloping horses are followed round a course, racing cars round a track, no speed being too great for the camera. This moving camera-work would not be possible without a mobile tripod. In days gone by, tripods were by no means capable of such movement. Their moving heads, upon which the cameras are securely screwed, were "panned" by the turning of handles, one handle for horizontal "pans," another for perpendicular. This necessitated the camera-man turning two handles simultaneously, one for the film, the other for movement, and it was physically impossible to follow any fast-moving object by such means. Perhaps, by feverish turning, a figure could be kept in the picture if it danced to the left, but to follow it back to the right almost instantly would result in the camera *following* it in the other sense of the word, but never catching up! Such tripods are not, of course, entirely superseded by the modern type, being used by many

camera-men whose work does not necessitate much moving camera work, but in all modern studio production the new type of gyroscopic tripod is in use, which has a geared head capable of being moved in any direction—completely round, side to side, upwards at any angle, and downwards in a lateral sweep. It is not moved by the turning of a handle, but by a projecting arm which the camera-man can easily manipulate whilst watching the action through the camera. These tripods play their part in every production, thereby lessening the number of separate shots which it was necessary to take prior to their adoption, for they permit greater freedom of movement by the characters, so that action can be shot in one scene instead of making several different shots, because the camera is unable to follow those movements smoothly and without interruption. But the modern tripod has done something more—for it has found its way into the hands of imaginative artists, who, with its aid, have begun to discover the infinite possibilities of creating rhythm by camera movement.

The hand-turned camera was noisy, and, when sound first raised its curious cry, motor-driven cameras were even noisier. The microphone, of course, picked up the nerve-wracking whirr of these motors, and thereby created a problem, which was, however, quickly settled by placing the cameras in sound-proof booths. These resembled small bathing machines on wheels, and possessed one wall of clear glass. Through this the camera "shot." The result was satisfactory in so far as the silencing of the camera was concerned, but it seemed as if camera movement was going to be a thing of the past. No longer

was it possible to obtain every kind of angle which the director desired, for he was having to content himself with only those which the camera could obtain within the narrow limits of the booth. Every shot entailed pushing the cumbersome little room into a new position, and production was considerably slowed up. In addition, lights could not be placed sufficiently near to the caged camera. It was for these reasons that the first sound pictures consisted almost entirely of "straight" camera-work—alternating between the long shot and the close-up.

But things have changed, and the booth has been superseded by the *silent camera*, which, though electrically driven, makes no noise, at least no noise which the microphone picks up.

There are several methods by which cameras have been silenced, but the one which has been most generally adopted is the fitting of Blimps. These are covers which envelop the cameras, shutting in all sound. Blimps are somewhat cumbersome, but effective. The new Cinephone camera, however, has a neat blimp built into the camera itself, and is regarded as being perfectly silent. In most instances, however, camera-men cover their instruments with eiderdowns and heavy cloths, to make quite sure no noise shall escape.

I hope that the foregoing references to the microphone, recording-room, and cameras, together with impressions of film-production in progress, offer an adequate description of the current methods adopted for making sound films of the usual Direct Voice type. By Direct Voice, I mean those films in which visual image and sound

synchronize, thereby creating the Talking Picture. This is the most important kind of film-making at the moment, and, incidentally, the most expensive. I have generalized intentionally throughout the above remarks, in order to describe methods common to all the recording systems, most famous of which are Western Electric and R.C.A., both American, and British Acoustics, created and used by the Gaumont Company.

There is, however, another important branch of sound production known as Post-synchronization. As the name implies, it is the art of adding sound to films *after* production, instead of taking sound and picture together. This work began with the coming of sound, when large numbers of silent productions were in existence, with little chance of being released owing to the preference for Talkies. Post-synchronization gave them a new lease of life. In many cases only music was added; in others, "effects" were made to synchronize with the action, and, when possible, voices were added. By adding music, these films became practical propositions for those theatres which had dispensed with their orchestras. Several of the great silent successes have been synchronized in this way, notably *Ben Hur*. But it was quickly realized that silent pictures which had been shot by cameras turning at the rate of sixteen pictures per second could not be successfully projected in theatres wired for talkies, by projectors turning at twenty-four pictures per second. This increased speed resulted in the movements of the characters becoming exaggerated to a laughable degree, and so, although the post-synchronizing of silent features prevented them from being dead losses,

there was great relief when the supply began to dwindle, ultimately to become extinct.

But the art of post-synchronization is not confined to infusing new life into dead films, for it is utilized both to create indirect sound in certain sequences of many productions, and to transform all kinds of non-dramatic subjects, which it is far better to "shoot" in silent form, into sound pictures.

Invariably, there are sequences in a production where it would obviously be both too expensive, and also a waste of time and effort, to record sounds which could quite easily be added later in the studio—the noise of locomotives, the thudding of hoofs, the roar of a crowd, the chiming of bells—hundreds of incidents which can be reproduced by artificial means.

The one thing which it is most difficult, if not impossible, to post-synchronize, and which, moreover, is rarely attempted, is the lip movement of speech—to put speech into the mouths of players whose voices were not recorded when their images were photographed. It is occasionally done, and in the case of short sentences, perfect results may be obtained after long rehearsals.

There are a number of ways of overcoming the difficulty of synchronizing lip movement—such as placing the characters in long shots, so that their mouths are almost invisible, or including sequences in which the faces of speakers are not visible to the cameras.

Altogether apart from such uses, post-synchronization plays an important part in many of the short sequences in news and interest reels, "effects" and descriptive commentaries being added after production.

Before explaining the way in which post-synchronization is carried out, I should like to refer to the art of creating "effects," which, though practised with the most crude pieces of apparatus imaginable, is nearer to solving the problem of the kind of sound for which the film is waiting, than the most ambitious direct voice production.

The myriad sounds of the world have made necessary the artificial creation of "effects," which would be immediately conspicuous by their absence in a sound film, but which when present are appreciated only subconsciously by an audience. The importance of "effects," whether they be natural sound (recorded whilst the corresponding images are being filmed), or artificial (and added after the production of the visual film), has not yet been fully realized. It is my contention that sound will ultimately supersede dialogue, a theory which I will explain a little later. For the present, let us study the ways and means of creating these sound effects, which, alas, are often rightly called noises.

The first curious fact is that the sound of some things, when recorded, does not resemble the sound of those things! For instance, the barks of some dogs or the rhythmic rolling of the wheels of light railways will not record as such, the former probably sounding more like cloth being torn, and the latter, being continuous, will create the impression that the recording of the film is bad, or projection faulty. On the other hand, I have known a dog's bark to be wonderfully faithful when it has been reproduced by a saw being drawn sharply across a piece of wood. Consequently, it has become necessary to establish Equivalent Acoustics; in other words, to

make various "gadgets," which, when operated, will create sounds to represent the sounds of objects, the actual sounds of which would sound like something else! This is, in fact, the art of reproducing artificial effects that will sound more realistic than natural sounds. The equipment of the Effects Department is by no means expensive. It consists of disused tins, rusty bits of chain, sheets of metal, coco-nuts, old wine-bottles, disused gramophones, old electric fans—in fact, all those articles which would be immediately thrown into the dustbin if an Effects Department were unnecessary.

When post-synchronizing, the first essential is, of course, the silent picture, completely finished, whether it be a feature, a sequence, or a short film of one or two reels.

For the moment, let us disregard the subject-matter of the film to be post-synchronized, for whether effects, voice or music are to be added, the same methods are adopted. The studio wherein this work takes place is fitted with a projecting machine and a screen, upon which the picture is thrown, the projector turning at twenty-four pictures per second. The whirr of the projector is inaudible in the studio, as it is some distance away, throwing its beam through a small glass partition in the projecting-room wall. In some cases the projector is housed outside the studio in a separate building. A microphone is suitably placed in the studio to pick up all sounds made by the people, who work by watching every movement on the screen intently. The recording instrument is turning exactly as it does when direct voice production is in progress, and the resultant negative

sound track it produces is ultimately printed, together with the picture negative of the silent film, which is thereby transformed into a sound production. It will be easily understood that the sound track running down the left-hand side of the picture cuts off a certain amount of it. In direct voice production this does not occur, as the cameras are fitted with sound masks in their gates which allow for the track, and the camera-men naturally square up their set on the reduced space which the inclusion of the mask creates. But in the case of many silent films taken some time ago, no allowance was made for the track, with the result that one sees the picture on the screen with a narrow slice cut off it. Nowadays, however, the sound mask is usually fitted to cameras engaged on silent work, so that the fault is remedied.

Let us assume that a short travel picture is to be post-synchronized, that it is approximately a thousand feet in length, and that the intention is to add a continuous musical accompaniment, together with a descriptive running commentary.

The orchestra, which has previously rehearsed the music with the picture, is placed before the screen. A microphone is stood several yards away, and a few bars are played whilst the recorder listens in to the effect on the speaker in the recording-room. Probably he will re-arrange the positions of the instrumentalists in order that some shall not drown others. Finally, the orchestra is perfectly set. Let us now turn to the commentator. He has a sound-proof box of his own, and also a microphone. He will watch the screen through a glass wall in his box, which is very like one of the old

camera booths; in fact, many of them are being used for this purpose. An interesting task now lies before the recorder. He has, we will assume, been informed that the music must form a background for the voice, which has to predominate throughout, that is, the music must be softened down to such a degree that the voice will always be clearly heard over and above it. It is for this reason that the orchestra and the commentator have a microphone each, as one for both would make it extremely difficult to lift one above the other and create the correct balance. By working on two the recorder can regulate them separately, bringing up the voice in proportion to the music, or *vice versa*. The film is then projected for a rehearsal, and when the balance of sound is perfect, and the commentator sure of his ability to be on time with his descriptive talk, the synchronizing is carried out. The commentator must keep uncomfortably still. The rustle of a page, the unconscious movement of a foot, a cough, or an arm movement on the table, would most probably necessitate a retake.

It is difficult, when post-synchronizing, to add music, voice, and effects simultaneously, as one or other is certain to conflict with the third. It is, therefore, advisable to eliminate one medium, sometimes the music, at other times the effects. Assuming there is no music, but effects and voice, the same procedure is gone through, but in place of the orchestra the effects men stand before the screen with their amazing collection of "instruments" and rehearse until they are perfectly in time with the action of the screen. The sound of an aeroplane engine can be realistically reproduced by holding a piece of brown

paper against an electric fan, and the shouts and cheering at public functions, football matches, and similar gatherings are extremely easy to add with the aid of every member of the studio staff yelling himself hoarse some distance from the microphone.

Most of the football matches, and other events attracting enormous crowds, which are included in news reels, are recorded on the spot, but some have cheering post-synchronized. Crowds in foreign countries, the constant murmuring in Eastern markets, and the sound of sea-waves and waterfalls, are mostly, if not all, post-synchronized in studios. It stands to reason that a complete recording unit is not going to journey up to the Scottish Highlands solely for the purpose of recording the sound of tumbling waters, when it can be reproduced with ease in the studios, incidentally permitting greater camera movement during the taking of those scenes, than if hampered, on a rocky location, with recording plant.

It will be realized, therefore, that post-synchronization is not only very convenient, but also an economy. Furthermore, it enables certain types of scenes and action to be shot unhampered by the limitations created by recording plant. In addition, it makes possible the running commentary which is so essential to certain types of films, particularly those of an industrial nature. In this work, if a recording plant was taken into certain factories, as, for instance, the Mint, or a canning factory, the resulting din on the screen would make the subject unbearable. Taken silent, the deafening row of the machinery is absent, and in its stead is the voice of the commentator helping the subject along, with the effects added at the

same time. The fact that they are by no means so loud as the actual machinery is unnoticed, and no sense of realism is lost.

Apart from all these uses of post-synchronization, I am of the opinion that *it holds the secret for creating the sound film of the future*. This raises the question—why should the sound film of the future be materially different from the sound film of to-day? Financially, there appears to be little reason for presuming that a change is either imminent or desirable. The existing form of dialogue picture is popular, and, at the time of writing, studios everywhere are producing films on the same lines as those of the past two years. What then, is implied by the sound film of the future? Minor improvements of sound, settings, stereoscopic photography, etc., and even finer recording and reproduction?

The answer is that though there is a large number of people connected with the making of films who genuinely believe that such technical improvements are the *only* changes which will be effected in the production of sound films, both in the near and distant future, there are others who foresee the ultimate disappearance of films as they are to-day, and productions of an entirely different character taking their place. It may be soon, or it may not occur until another generation has gripped the reins. In elucidating this, I should like to make it clear that my opinion is not in any way due to the extraneous influence of what is commonly called "highbrowism," nor, at the other extreme, commercialism. Rather is it the result of constant contact with both films and the people responsible

for them, together with a study of the body for which they are supposed to be made, the Public.

Firstly, I believe, in common with most people, that the future of the sound film is tremendous, but unlike most people I do not believe in the dialogue film, which I feel has comparatively little future. As I write this, in 1932, there are definite signs of uneasiness in the film industry, on both sides of the Atlantic, and the reason is not far away.

Before sound, films were universal. They were sent to every corner of the globe, and every race could understand them. Therein lay their power. No medium of expression, except music, possesses such a universal appeal as the silent film. Its power lay in its international value, which increased its *financial* value. One silent production, if world-wide distribution was secured, resulted in large profits; to-day the position is very different, since distribution of a dialogue picture must almost always be confined to English-speaking countries, while the cost of production has increased enormously. Undoubtedly, the introduction of dialogue has transformed a medium of limitless universal appeal into an entertainment definitely national in character, with all the inevitable limitations which nationalism must create.

By becoming national it diminishes its chances of developing into a great art. Admittedly, dialogue pictures are distinctly novel and interesting, and they are drawing vast audiences to see and hear them, but only from those countries which speak the language they contain. And even more serious is the fact that the dialogue film not only loses its greatest power, but, in the process,

assumes a shape which is but a necessarily inferior imitation of the stage, from which it should steer clear.

Imitation never has been, and never can be the basis of any important creative art. Originality must control production, and that can only happen when the medium in question becomes *entirely independent*. Perhaps there is no more paradoxical example of rapid progress than that of the film, which began, to a great extent, along the right lines, and, at the psychological time when it was nearing the stage of establishing its unique character of independent expression, suddenly turned round, and galloped back, *along the wrong road*.

In delving still farther into the question of the right application of sound it is necessary to consider the importance of music, for in the past it was music which increased the appeal of the silent film. I cannot imagine any more beautiful combination than a great orchestra accompanying a great film drama, and recent programmes of silent Russian films, presented in this manner, enable one to taste again the joys of the cinema which, to all outward appearances, had gone for ever. In my opinion, music is essential to the film, and its great power has by no means been sufficiently exploited in the making of sound films; rather has dialogue almost entirely *superseded* it.

The sound film of the future will be fundamentally different, possibly for material reasons, by the solving of the problem which is puzzling financiers and producers alike to-day—the re-establishing of world markets, by removing barriers created by speech. It is realized that the removal of dialogue would immediately re-create the

international film, but, up to the present, no one knows what to substitute in its place, or even if a substitute is necessary. Dialogue has arrived, and, moreover, the public has been trained to expect and enjoy it. Obviously, a return to silent films would be out of the question. Even a return to them with synchronized music would not compensate for the loss of dialogue. What, then, is the solution?

As I see the situation, sound of the future can be likened to the orchestra of yesterday. Briefly, it is my contention that the film will ultimately be accompanied by *indirect sound*, which may or may not be post-synchronized, but which, for reasons of universal appeal, will *never be wholly recorded direct*. I will explain that further.

Firstly, the sound film that is true to its medium will contain human speech, but only *when* such speech is essential, and the presentation of it will be so different from direct speech (lip movement seen and heard) that it would be more accurately described as *sound*. It will be different in that the image of the person speaking will not be seen on the screen during that speech. Instead, the *listener* will be visible, registering, by facial expression, the necessary dramatic reaction to the speaker's words. Such speech will occur only on those occasions when it is vital to the development of the narrative, a wholly different policy from the existing one, for it means that films will talk only *because* they must, and not incessantly, and merely because they can.

Indirect speech will enable the film to retain its artistic independence, will destroy its present resemblance to the stage, and will re-establish its universal appeal, for it will

be a simple matter to post-synchronize the speech of an *unseen* speaker in any language, and there will be no necessity to attempt to synchronize lip movement, nor record a production in every detail several times in several languages. Equally important, however, will be the ingenious application of sound, all sounds—woven into music which, when developed, will be more descriptive than any dialogue can be. Some idea of the future film can be gathered from those parts of *Le Million* where the dramatic motive is *described* by music, with such brilliance that image and music create a perfect unity. It is hardly possible to exemplify a symphony of sounds, made to harmonize or dovetail into vividly descriptive music (not to be confused with a musical “setting”), but the imagination of the reader can well realize the possibilities, and, by recalling *Mickey Mouse* or a *Silly Symphony* cartoon, will understand even more the undreamed-of possibilities awaiting a true association of sound and image.

Examples, however, of indirect sound are within reach. A man sits alone in a room which is dimly lit. He breathes heavily and audibly, in a long shot of the room. Whilst the camera “pans” around the room, bringing to view the shabby furniture, pictures, and ornaments, his heavy, regular breathing is heard, *although his image is not seen on the screen*. The staircase leading up to the door of this room is then seen, and a man is visible at the bottom. Stealthily, he begins to climb the stairs. We return to a shot of the room and hear the creaking of the stairs without, and the voice of the visitor muttering angrily. A close-up of the door knob follows. It is being

turned from the outside and accompanying this close-up we hear the voice of the man in the room : "Who's that?" You will observe that the person speaking is not visible whilst he speaks in either case. Similarly, the stairs are not seen when they are creaking.

A conversation between two people would be produced so that the listener only was visible, the camera quickly cutting from one figure to another, and the speaker always being off the screen. A group of people being addressed by one would be visible, whilst the voice of the speaker would accompany their images. By this method of approach, it will be seen that human speech will play its part in the indirect sound film of the future, but being indirect it will be categorized as sound, rather than speech.

Quite naturally, it is far from easy to visualize, at the present time, a screen conversation of the type outlined above which will be completely satisfying to the public, but this is due only to the temporary omnipotence of the direct talking film. In the silent film, speech was not missed despite the fact that every character on the screen was seen to be speaking, a point which makes it easier to agree with the ultimate acceptance of audible but "invisible" speech.

The sounds of the world are at the disposal of the film, and it is the primary function of this important medium to capture them. At present, sound is secondary to speech, whereas indirect speech *becomes* sound. It will be listened to by the audience in the same way as the images on the screen will be seen listening to it, and the skill of the director will again be exercised, in creating facial expression which will reflect emotions aroused by

the speech. To-day, on the other hand, the director of the talking film finds himself bound by the material he is attempting to portray in terms of cinema. He endeavours, or one hopes he endeavours, to create action, the basis of the film, and finds it is impossible. Instead, he is holding a mirror up to the stage and attempting to infuse new life into the reflection, of course, in vain.

My faith in indirect sound is based on an exhaustive study of direct sound, for it has become obvious to me that speech has in no way heightened the dramatic appeal of the film, and that the consequent elimination of music has lessened it. Furthermore, as I have remarked previously, there is the additional problem dialogue has created by depriving the film of its world-wide appeal. All methods up to the time of writing have failed, save for the extravagant and laborious multi-lingual practice of producing a film three or four times, which, if not impracticable, is thoroughly unsound, and succeeds only in delaying the arrival and perfection of a treatment that should be both artistically and financially satisfactory.

The question arose recently, whether a musician playing, for instance, a violin, should not be regarded as a legitimate subject for direct sound treatment, in view of the fact that music is universally understood, and it was suggested that the violinist should play his solo and be visible whilst doing so. It was decided that whilst the solo would be appreciated by all races, to make such a film would be to turn the screen into a concert platform. The way in which such a subject might, however, be treated would be to commence the sequence with a shot of the violinist playing his opening bars, and then to insert

a series of pictures which would, as accurately as possible, illustrate the music and interpret the emotions and sensations aroused, by glimpses of clouds, waves, fields, blossom, rippling water, etc., ending the sequence with the image of the violinist.

Indirect speech will not predominate in the soundest of sound films, for the film's own vivid method of narration which appeals primarily to the eye, aided by sounds and music in harmony, will make speech comparatively unnecessary. Musical and visual expression will join hands and the result will be a sound film capable of being understood by all living people.

Personally, I should not search in the legitimate theatre, nor in the library, for my film stories. Instead, I should look for people capable of translating life into the pictorial, rhythmic language of the screen, as the Russians have done, and if I was accused of attempting to make the film "highbrow" I would point out that the Russians have made their films primarily for their peasant population, in which "highbrows" are conspicuous by their absence. All the noteworthy Soviet films I have seen are as easily understood by the most undeveloped minds as they are appreciated by the "intelligentsia." I defy any one anywhere to witness *Earth*, or *The End of St. Petersburg*, and come away confused as to the meaning of either, or without being exhilarated by the beauty and intensity of the drama. What Russia has done with the film apart from propaganda, Britain and America can do, and they need lose no money over it. Russia has discovered the Film, and it is time that those countries wealthier in *material* riches should endeavour to do the same.

Mention of Russia brings me to the art of Cutting, most highly developed in that experimenting nation, and a short visit to the cutting-room, wherein a production can be made or marred, will prove interesting, for it is here that filmic time is created, and the countless, and, prior to assembling, meaningless, strips of film are welded into organic unity. Building is a more appropriate word to describe this work than cutting, which infers a wholesale snipping and shortening of the "takes"; actually, a production depends entirely upon this wonderful work, which gives life to the dead strips. To understand this completely, one must remember that the camera has recorded a series of events which naturally occupy *real* time, whether those events depict traffic, people fighting, birds flying, processions, or anything else. Each and every event was performed in a natural manner, and consequently at a natural speed, occupying regulation seconds and minutes. But a new time, filmic time, is created by the cutter, who can control the *tempo* by the number of strips he joins together, and their respective lengths. Before he commences they are meaningless. Each strip or "take" projected on the screen separately would convey little or nothing. Joined correctly, they become transformed into self-explaining sequences, their power depending upon the degree of genius employed to assemble them. If the shots were joined together in any order the resultant chaos would leave an audience aghast. Similarly, if the strips were assembled in their correct order, but *in their original lengths*, their value would disappear. Take, for example, firstly, an incident as a person would witness it in real life. A man walks along a

street. Another man runs after him and picks his pocket, and runs off. A policeman on the opposite side of the road suddenly looks up and sees the incident. He runs after the pickpocket. The robbed man realizes what has happened and stands, momentarily dazed, staring at the thief being chased by the policeman.

A spectator would see this happening in a number of *short panic glances*, alternating between the three figures in the drama, but a camera would shoot the incident in such a way as to produce the following film strips, each strip presenting only a portion of the dramatic incident, which can only be portrayed by the correct assembling of all the strips in their right order—

1. Man walking along street, whistling, stops to look at fruit stall, and handles some apples.
2. Pickpocket sidles up and picks his pocket.
3. Close-up of policeman's face watching incident.
4. Thief running away.
5. Policeman running.
6. The robbed man, suddenly aware of his loss, runs in same direction.
7. Another shot of robbed man running along street.

Suppose we assemble them *incorrectly*—

1. Man walking along street, whistling, stops to look at fruit stall, and handles some apples.
3. Close-up, policeman's face watching.
7. Robbed man running.
5. Policeman running.
4. Thief running.
6. Robbed man, aware of his loss, begins to run.
2. Thief sidles up and picks pocket.

The effect is entirely altered, and the first few shots as assembled create the impression that the policeman

having seen the man at the fruit stall stealing fruit, chases him, and the pickpocket incident becomes quite incomprehensible. I have detailed the above example to give emphasis to the fact that the film strips in themselves are valueless until edited, containing only images which depend upon each other to create an organic unity.

We have not, however, finished with our pickpocket drama, for we must now imagine it assembled in logical order, but by someone possessing no knowledge of filmic time or space. The result would be a series of very long strips, which, though clearly explaining the incident, would, by reason of their extreme length, transform what should be a quick-moving drama into a drawn-out event which would lose all its significance. The man to be robbed would handle the apples for a ridiculously long period. The watching face of the policeman would remain on the screen long enough to give the impression that he was day-dreaming, and the shots of the running figures, each shown in its entirety, would in no way create filmic time, the whole dragging interminably, and producing no excitement in the audience.

Now let us see the cutter at work on these strips. He would begin with the long shot of the man approaching the fruit stall, and handling the fruit, because this is continuous action, which cannot be interrupted. Then would follow *half* of shot No. 2 showing the pickpocket sidling up to the man. A mere flash of No. 3, the policeman's watching face, would follow, and then No. 2 would be resumed, showing the pickpocket actually picking the pocket. Then No. 5, showing the policeman running, but only half the shot, and then a portion of No. 4 would

be inserted showing the thief running. A short length of No. 6 showing the robbed man realizing his loss. A cut back to the policeman running. Then the robbed man running. Then a portion of No. 7, the thief running. And so on, to and fro, flashes of the running figures, building up a rapid rhythm of picture alternation. The cutter's language is the manipulation of his strips, and the combination of them to create a filmic representation of a reality, thereby making it something more than real, in a *time* which cannot be judged by normal time. The pickpocket incident assumes dramatic proportions which only the film can portray, when the strips out of which it is made are assembled with understanding.

Here is another example of cutting showing the comprehensiveness of the film. Imagine that a liner is departing and that it is necessary to portray the departure in the most dramatic way possible. Obviously, one camera position showing the great bulk of the vessel gradually leaving the dock-side would be inadequate. Here, then, is one interpretation of the incident—each of the images mentioned being a separate shot: 1. Captain's hand in close-up, moving bridge indicator to "Engines." 2. Engines slowly turning. 3. Close-up of siren shrieking. 4. Old woman on dock-side staring upwards. 5. Youth waving from deck. 6. Sailor chewing gum nonchalantly and staring at dock crowd. 7. Engines gathering speed. 8. Old man crying and waving from deck. 9. Child waving from dock-side. 10. Long shot of vessel drawing away from dock. 11. Mass of heads over side of deck, and hands waving. 12. Rope straining. 13. Engines reversing. 14. Old woman farther away waving. A series of

close-ups of contrasting expressions and people, cut in to create a fast rhythm and transform what is a very slow-moving event into a highly dramatic and rapid one. The drama of a departing liner by reason of its slowness loses its appeal if presented on the screen in *real* time. Filmic time transforms it into an intensified version of itself.

It is necessary to turn to some of the Russian films for examples of brilliant cutting. *Earth*, for instance, is one of the most brilliantly constructed productions made. In this, every kind of *tempo* is created solely by cutting, the basis of the Russian film. The opening to this beautiful picture shows the death of a grandfather before members of succeeding generations—son, grandson and great-grandson, a tiny child eating an apple. Apart from the symbolism of this sequence, it is obvious that the *tempo* should be slow, and impressive. For this reason, the alternating close-ups of the various characters are held on the screen for long periods, thereby creating the desired mood. This should be compared with the rapid cutting later on, showing the inhabitants of the village awaiting the arrival of the tractor which is to revolutionize farming. In quick succession we see flashes of watching faces, girls, men, oxen, horses, girls, men, oxen, horses, again and again, peasants alone and in groups, each group an example of composition. The mood is lively; the people are smiling, laughing, and shouting. The cutting quickens, which means that the shots become shorter. Later still, an example of cutting follows which leaves one gasping for breath, as shot follows shot with lightning speed. This is in the sequence showing the achievements of the

tractor, and harvesting in progress. In close-ups we see the rapid cutting of the corn, binding, stacking, grinding, sifting, and finally, trays of loaves being wheeled from the bakery—the merest flashes, intercut, flashing back, stacking, cutting, stacking, grinding, binding, cutting, stacking. And then slow *tempo* once more, when the day's work is done, and evening has descended. Long strips, showing motionless figures grouped together, establish the calmness which pervades the village, and the joy of well-earned rest.

The end of the film is measured, impressive, and very beautiful. The screen is filled with luscious fruit upon which rain is falling. No quick flashes, but long, yet perfectly timed close-ups of fruit, becoming larger as the film nears its conclusion, which is portrayed by an enormous apple filling the screen.

In *The End of St. Petersburg*, amazing examples of cutting were seen, particularly in the battle scenes; for example, quick shots of soldiers dying in trenches, alternating with shots of money-mad financiers at the Bourse; a soldier's body lying head-first in a pond immediately followed by a couple dining extravagantly in an expensive restaurant; civilians carrying inspiring banners, followed by huge explosions at the front. A simple method, after all, to indict war, which no other medium of expression could attempt!

John Grierson's *Drifters*, the two-reel film devoted to the work of a fishing fleet, remains one of the finest examples of British film construction up to the time of writing. Here is a subject which, in the hands of someone lacking Grierson's genius and understanding of filmic time,

might have made a slow-moving subject, containing comparatively little interest. But Grierson has captured the spirit of the toiling fisherman, and makes us feel the fury of the seas and the labour involved in bringing a great catch ashore. But to achieve this he has remodelled the subject to the screen, and intensified the dramatic nature of the work of the fleet, without falsifying any of the incidents which make it so thrilling a spectacle. By brilliant cutting, rapid filmic time governs the film, and methods similar to, if not identical with, Soviet film construction are employed. Recall those series of rapid shots, showing the drifters battling with the storm: swaying funnel pouring forth smoke, panting engines, waves rising over decks, hunched figures toiling at the nets; engines again; ropes slowly winding on winches; a mast against storm-clouds; quicker and quicker, rhythm mad in its rapidity and intensity.

It will now be seen how all processes in the creating of a film are interrelated, for the cutting-room is dependent upon the efficiency of the cameras, which are under the direct control of the producer who works methodically from the scenario, the writer of which was visualizing the strips as they would reach the cutter.

Dominating all should be the urge to create rhythm, the greatest emotional influence on an audience, and by the manipulation of hundreds of film strips this rhythm is established, but not, unfortunately, in hundreds of films. Only a few possess the *Movement* which makes of them works of art.

CHAPTER VII

THE INTEREST FILM

How it is made—Ideas men—The News-reel—Screen Journalism—The Cartoon—The advertisement film and the public.

IN practically every programme there appears, sandwiched in between the "big" pictures, an interest film, regarded by most exhibitors as a "fill-up" and by the audience as a sort of interesting interval. It is a short film, usually a one-reeler, almost identical in construction with the news-reel, except that the material it contains is not of a topical nature. Nevertheless, interest and news-reels are invariably classed together by exhibitors and public alike, though in reality they are as distinct as daily newspapers are from monthly magazines. Being the shortest items on the programme, they are regarded as the least important, though many cinema-goers find the few minutes they occupy the most interesting of the evening.

One presumes that the reason why these little subjects are called interest films is because they interest people in a general way, without invading the territories of the news-reel, cartoon, or comedy. Nevertheless, I feel that a more appropriate name might be given to this class of film, just as more appropriate material might be found to include in it. There are numbers of different series of these one-reelers on both sides of the Atlantic, which are, with few exceptions, constructed on the same lines, though photographic quality and methods of editing

naturally vary a great deal, and they are released weekly, entailing an entirely fresh reel to be made fifty-two times a year.

Taken as a whole, however, the interest film consists of several (usually five or six) short sequences, joined together by captions, each sequence approximately 200 feet in length. Only a person who has struggled to condense a subject into 200 feet of film can know the difficulty of such work. In the hands of a cutter who is not thoroughly conversant with this class of production, the result is almost bound to be scrappy, and the ending of the sequence abrupt. There are, however, examples of such work which manage to portray, smoothly and effortlessly, sequences which begin, develop, and terminate logically. Such instances are rare, and, consequently, the average interest film consists of every kind of subject "cut" down to a minimum footage, more or less regardless of the pictorial result. Imagine, for example, trying to condense into 200 feet the construction of a motor-car or the many processes involved in the making of paper, or fretting to decide which of the countless attractive shots are the *least* necessary when building up a subject that will show clearly how steel is manufactured. Of course, when a subject is of particular importance, and it is found impossible to shorten it to the required length, an exception is made, and the excess footage is balanced by eliminating or shortening one of the other items. An important point arises in connection with such work, involving a question which producers of interest films should seriously consider. Quite obviously, many extremely interesting subjects are

lost to the screen by reason of the impossibility of condensing them into the footage demanded by the commercial interest film; and judging by the existing methods adopted by camera-men, cutters, and editors, there appears to be no alternative to continuing to lose them. This, however, is entirely due to the usual method of approaching subjects, industrial or otherwise, in which there would appear to be a lack of understanding of the medium of the film. Rarely does one see in these short films any proof that those engaged in making them are conversant with the art of cutting, or, shall we say, see any necessity to employ their ingenuity when constructing such unimportant things as one-reelers. Usually, there are the half-dozen subjects, each shot unimaginatively, with little or no attempt to dramatize or emotionalize them.

Despite this, I have frequently found that the "big" picture has been the little picture in a programme, and that the little one has been the feature. In the film world, however, a film is judged to be a feature by its footage, and it is a "fill-up" if it is a one-reeler. An adjustment of values is, therefore, necessary if the interest film is to be regarded seriously, which is the first step towards its being produced properly.

It is my contention that a well-constructed interest film can be nearer to film art than the film story, because it portrays just those events and places which cannot be portrayed by any other medium of expression. The fact that the Interest reel is non-fictional is its greatest advantage over the dramatic feature. It can bring to the screen places near and far, industries, sports, clothes, everything which constitutes Life, without straining to find a reason for

doing so. But to execute this work to the best advantage, it must be handled with as much care and thought as goes to the making of a "big" picture, if not more. To take the cameras to a motor works, a paper factory, or a steel foundry, fully prepared to capture a filmic impression of these industries and dramatize them as Grierson has dramatized the fishing industry, and as Ruttman "remade" Berlin, is not work which can be done hurriedly. It is a very different thing from standing the camera up before each process, turning, and passing on to the next, with the result that a *complete* pictorial account is brought back and either inserted as it was shot, or made to suffer by the elimination of half the shots for footage reasons. In the short space which these one-reelers offer, no attempts should be made to show everything. This is fully realized when it is learnt that almost every subject worth its place in an interest film would take several entire reels if a comprehensive pictorial survey of the process were to be given.

Two hundred feet of film plus the imagination of the audience is preferable to a thousand feet leaving the audience with nothing to do but become bored.

What usually happens is that camera-men are hurriedly dispatched to film all kinds of subjects as quickly as possible, frequently with no knowledge of what they will see until they arrive. The following comparison will further emphasize the difference between feature and non-fictional production. The cotton industry is to be shot for an interest film. The camera-man reaches the factory, having been given brief instructions and an idea of the subject. He shoots all he can, and returns.

But we will suppose the cotton industry is to form a background to certain sequences in a feature film. The scenarist visits and studies the mills, makes exhaustive notes of the positions of the looms, records in his notebook which machines offer opportunities for the cutter to infuse rhythm into the picture, and which spots will make the best backgrounds for the characters. Ultimately, the production unit arrives at the mills, and may probably take a week or so to shoot perhaps ten short scenes, each carefully chosen. True, the looms are secondary to the plot, forming only a background, but they are shot with such care that the interest reel editor could make a remarkably fine cotton subject out of the "cut-outs" from that production, that is, from the shots of the plant which include no characters, and the result would be infinitely superior to the subject which the interest reel camera-man hurriedly shot without previous study.

It is only fair to point out that time is an important factor in making these short reels. A continuous weekly output, year after year, does not permit much, if any, breathing space, and there is very little time for cameramen to study the subjects they have to film. If a director produces three big pictures a year he has done well, and the total footage would not exceed 30,000 ft. The weekly interest reel amounts to about 50,000 ft. per annum, composed of hundreds of unconnected little sequences, all of which require looking for very hard. The magnitude of the work, therefore, is some excuse for the lack of technical progress apparent in these reels.

And yet, taking into consideration the eternal rush to make the weekly film, I am unable entirely to excuse it

for the low standard of production it reaches. The whole fundamental approach will have to be altered, if the sequences in these reels are to justify themselves on the screen of the future, and all the elements of serious production, continuity, filmic time, and sensitive cutting, must be employed.

More drama, more thrills, and more beauty can be infused into the interest film than into most of the slick, polished features, which are as divorced from real cinema as the novel is from architecture.

I am not particularly keen on mentioning Soviet production methods at frequent intervals, but I must say here that it would be interesting to see their best men produce some interest films which would comply with the requirements of the commercial cinema, by containing selections of varied items. The treatment each item would receive would open the eyes of many, and the emotions aroused by the sheer beauty of pictorial composition, ships, landscapes, and life itself, enacted by the people one sees everywhere, would leave the audience far more exhilarated than they are after ten thousand feet devoted to gilding the sex problem.

In the category of general interest subjects the travel film is included. I am not referring to feature-length travel films, but to the one-reeler, usually a pictorial survey of one particular country. There are hosts of these, most of which have created the illusion that it is possible to see the world from an armchair in a cinema. Too long have we been satisfied with these carelessly made pictures—so often spoilt by continuous commentaries that describe *everything*—which in no way make us

better acquainted with the world, nor exploit the limitless possibilities of the Film.

As in the case of the interest film, it would appear accepted that there is little skill required in making a travel film, all that is necessary being, apparently, to send the camera-man to Africa, India, Japan, or Spain and let him run wild, the subsequent assembling of the strips requiring no ingenuity—merely a series of shots portraying the most easily-found beauty spots, and traditional customs of various peoples, possibly obtained from guide books. In fact, the Londoner viewing travel pictures comes away knowing almost as little about the countries he has seen on the screen as he does about his own London! The camera rarely peers beneath the surface, seldom captures the *real* spirit of the place it is shooting. The cutter never gets to work to transform the strips into something more than views. An audience must feel itself walking through the bazaars, rubbing shoulders with the natives, perspiring in the heat, getting parched as it stares at the shrivelled trees; it must marvel at the energy of the workers, and feel tired with them; it must get into direct touch with the country it is looking at and be drawn into the screen, and this is only possible when the life of that country is presented with all the skill and imagination man can bring to concentrate on the production. It is of little use going to Mexico or India and filming anything and everything haphazardly, relying on the picturesqueness of those nations to "get the film over." There is equal scope in London, and although I would hesitate to compare the pictorial beauty of the Taj Mahal with the Caledonian Market, the latter offers

opportunities which travel film producers should discover before wandering over the earth seeking for material; Birmingham and Berwick Market before Barcelona and Buenos Aires—Berwick Market, which offers as many possibilities as the aromatic bazaars of Cairo, capable of being made no less interesting, if handled in the right way.

The "scenic" sequence is something else, although the term is also applied to travel films. Usually, however, it is composed of a series of pictures portraying some well-known beauty spot or occasionally a little-known one, but only occasionally. Invariably, however, it is of some definite place, a castle, river, waterfall, or mountain. Rarely is the beauty of the countryside photographed for itself unless some specific object has drawn the attention of the film-maker to it. For instance, a ploughing competition would very probably result in a number of "topical" camera-men being dispatched to make a "story" out of it, but the results would in no way resemble the shots of the ploughman and his team in *Earth*. The countless beauties of spring would not be considered a suitable "story" unless, perhaps, a mannequin strode before the blossoms displaying spring fashions.

In brief, the interest film, embracing the scenic, and the travel picture, at present excludes anything unless it tells a story, thereby excluding the story of Life itself.

The transition of the interest film from a silent to a sound product has been crudely effected. In both cases, a varied assortment of subjects is joined together with

captions. The silent version, however, was preferable in so far as the captions were concerned, for they were silent, and, consequently, less jarring. Now, however, that silence is a bogey from which all flee, the screen must never be quiet for an instant, and so the joining captions are accompanied by a few bars of music which end as abruptly as they begin. This music is rarely carried over into the sequence which follows, for, in most cases, it would be impossible to do so, as the subject invariably possesses its own music or speech. The simple solution of making the sound or music of the sequence extend back to the title which is introducing it has not been attempted. Whether captions are necessary is a matter of opinion, but the sudden breaking-off of a subject and the appearance of a title introducing the next item with spasmodic music running through it does not tend to create the desired reaction in an audience.

Apart from the question of quality, both imaginative and photographic, the making of a weekly or fortnightly interest film is very fascinating. The first essential is a library, not of books, but films—hundreds of self-contained sequences, kept in a more or less ready state for inclusion in a reel. As a series consumes half a dozen each week, and as there is always a percentage of unusable subjects, owing to bad weather, unsuitability of subject, or difficulty of condensing, it will be apparent that the camera-men feeding the library are rarely inactive. They, in turn, are fed by “ideas men,” who concentrate upon finding suitable subjects for filming. They scour the country for novelties, new industries, old customs, fashions, quaint pets, sporting feats, in fact, every

sort of happening which contains interest, but which is not topical. They would, for instance, ignore the Boat Race, which would be shot and released within a few hours by news-reel crews, but they might arrange to make a subject on the theory and practice of rowing by the winning crew, which could be released months after the Boat Race, having no topical value.

Since the arrival of sound, however, makers of interest reels have found themselves faced by countless problems in regard to obtaining suitable material, and at the same time catering for the desire to present such material in "sound" form. Interesting industries, previously shot silent, were timidly approached by units with a microphone, but the deafening roar of machines soon sent them scurrying away. Experience showed them that the post-synchronization of mechanical sounds was the best way out, except, of course, in those cases where the actual sounds lent themselves to being recorded.

Fashion then received their attention. Previously, mannequins had displayed their robes in silence. Now, it was thought, they would be able to speak and describe what they wore. This was tried, and it was quickly discovered that beauty of form does not imply beauty of speech! In several ways sound, however, has been introduced both by speech and effects, and it is generally regarded as an improvement on the silent Interest Film.

But in one direction sound has made a fundamental difference to interest films, for it has opened the doors to vaudeville, and the artists of that long-suffering profession have streamed in. Undoubtedly, the inclusion of "turns" in interest films has relieved the minds of

editors and ideas men in their search for material, but it has removed the interest film itself even farther from its ultimate goal. Altogether apart from commercial demands, which must be supplied, I can imagine nothing more fundamentally unsuitable for portrayal on the screen than a music-hall "turn." Excellent though it may be in its proper place, it strikes quite the wrong note.

With feature films being drawn from stage plays, and interest films being composed of music-hall and concert turns, we are losing all sight of the Film, its power to dramatize Life, and the new art it has created, which, for the moment, we may call MOVEMENT. Instead we are confronted with "turns" many of which were old ten years ago, the artists standing before the camera uttering patter the reaction to which is completely different from the reaction when it is spoken in a music-hall.

And yet one is told that the public demand these subjects and that without them there would be a serious shortage of suitable material for interest films! No further comment is necessary for the reader to realize just why those things are filmed which ought not to be filmed, whilst the vital things remain unseen.

The same criticism might be levelled at any of the news reels which are so prominent to-day, for it is debatable whether their editors have as yet truly discovered what does and does not constitute news in the screen sense of the word. There can be no doubt that the news reel is extremely popular, no further proof being needed than the opening of several theatres devoted entirely to showing them in short-length programmes.

There are several distinct series of these subjects, some British, others American, and the quality varies considerably, but one and all are made from the same recipe of stringing together a number of "news" items, with musical titles, as in the case of the interest film.

So progressive are the makers of these films that vast organizations have sprung up since the advent of sound, which has given a new lease of life to the old news-reel, and crews are stationed in all parts of the world feeding editorial staffs with items to build up the weekly or bi-weekly reel. Well-equipped sound vans are dispatched anywhere to record sounds and pictures of any event likely to be of public interest, from a fire to a cattle show.

The photographic quality of many of the short news sequences is naturally not good, as a topical subject must be shot regardless of weather conditions, whereas the material in the interest film, having no release urgency, is shot only under suitable conditions. In news-reels, however, photographic quality is secondary to subject-matter, and a football match shot in the rain is used without hesitation, and used quickly. As I have previously stated, a considerable number of the sounds heard in news-reels, which are chiefly shouts, yells, and the noise of aeroplane engines, are post-synchronized.

The topical camera-man has to work very hard and become accustomed to shooting under the most adverse conditions, but there is no finer training-ground for him. Many camera-men now engaged on important studio productions served their apprenticeship shooting warehouses on fire in fogs, and battleships being launched in steady rain.

There are many difficult jobs in the film industry, but I am inclined to think that the editor of a news-reel has the hardest. Passing over the hundred and one obstacles which confront him in getting his subjects out with all possible speed, there is the amazingly difficult task of obtaining the right kind of subjects, and sufficient of them. It should be realized that more than fifty per cent of the material which constitutes news for the press is useless for the news film, and so we find these reels solving the difficulty by giving prominence to items which are of comparatively little importance, but which, by inclusion in a reel, assume topical proportions equal to those of a newspaper's headliner. Intermingled with unimportant provincial functions, comparatively unknown or uninteresting people arriving at stations, and the inevitable inspection of troops, one constantly sees sequences of a non-topical nature, which appear to be topical because they are in news-reels. There are invariably glimpses of Eastern functions, earthquakes, foreign celebrities rushing about in closed cars and therefore invisible, Japanese school treats, and mountain-climbing. In addition, news-reels, for want of material, invade the territory of the interest reel, and insert sequences which by no stretch of the imagination can be deemed topical. There should, of course, be a mutual understanding that both types of films must remember their respective places, for this broadening of the field of the news-reel is tending to undermine the interest film.

Nevertheless, the news-reel in its present form satisfies the public, and consequently there is no sound reason for altering its policy, unless an urge is felt to mould it more

carefully to the requirements of the screen, and take advantage of the opportunities which the medium of the film offers.

This would necessitate news-reel editors revising their whole method of approach, firstly, by realizing that there is no similarity between Fleet Street and Wardour Street. Screen journalism is new, and definitely of this age. It is using a medium far more powerful than the written word, and requires both skill and imagination to make the best of it. There should be nothing crude about the presentation of a news-reel, no abrupt, badly-finished sequences, leaving the audience suspended in mid-air.

Too often are we confronted by statesmen and other notabilities making speeches which, without warning, finish abruptly half-way through, and before we have realized the fact, we are watching an abbreviated version of a football match.

Each and every subject should be produced with the maximum amount of ingenuity. Most important of all, however, should be the choice of subjects, and in connection with this, the commercial necessity for a definite weekly release, irrespective of whether there has been any occurrence suitable for insertion or not, creates a big and almost insoluble problem which, to a very great extent, excuses the contents of the average news-reel.

Perhaps the solution lies in merging the interest reel into the news-reel completely, the latter making no further pretence at presenting *only* topical items. This would at least enable the reel thus formed to embrace a great variety of interesting features, covering items of feminine interest, the home, the child, the garden,

etc. Whether that is practical or otherwise, something fresh is sure to evolve out of the news-reel of to-day, which cannot easily continue week after week, indefinitely, filled with so much that is unworthy of a place on the screen, and I see no logical reason why the interest reel should stand aloof from the struggle, when by unloading its infinitely more interesting contents into the news-reel it will be doing a good turn to both series which would, perhaps, result in eliminating both the good and the bad "turns," and sending them back to the music-hall they came from. Whichever way it happens, however, time will bring greater production value to these short films, for already it is apparent in a few instances that those engaged on making them are realizing that the "fill-up," whether it be news or interest, must reach the same standard of technical efficiency as the long films it supports.

I would repeatedly whisper into the ears of all news editors, "*Don't forget the basic need of your medium,*" and if they asked what that need was, I should shout rather than whisper, "MOVEMENT!"

Movement is the essence of the film, and in only one example of short subjects is it really apparent, in Disney's cartoons, *Mickey the Mouse*, and the *Silly Symphonies*. Disregarding the occasional vulgarities in these films, there is no work on the screen more truly cinematic than Disney's creations. Here is movement, rhythmic movement, brilliant in every detail, to which audiences all over the world immediately respond, not wholly on account of the simple but ironic comedy, but also by reason of human reaction to natural rhythm.

These are no carelessly slung-together strips, but the outcome of the most serious thought and consequent understanding of the power of moving image and musical expression welded together. They are of the screen, for nowhere else could they be expressed. They are pure movement, unreal, yet so real that we find ourselves reflected in the grotesque beings which inhabit the world Disney draws. Now that Felix the cat is away, Disney's mice will play, one hopes, for ever, and I am unable to imagine how time can improve his technique. Though he peoples his scenes with beetles, flies, caterpillars and all those creatures of which we are not particularly fond, he creates beauty by design and movement. The word which best describes his work is "flowing," and even the most unsophisticated audience responds to it, whilst the more intelligent instantly realize they are watching the most serious clowning ever devised.

"How are cartoons made?" is a question in the minds of most people, and I can only satisfy this curiosity by saying "by the most laborious work in the whole film business." They are created by the same lengthy process as that by which dotted lines are made to dart across maps, flowers made to open, inanimate objects made to move—by the process known as "One turn one picture," which, as it implies, means one turn of the camera handle taking one picture only. To make the dotted line grow entails fixing the camera (usually overhead, and pointing down at the cartoonist's desk) and then making one dot, one handle turn, another dot, another turn, and so on, until the complete line is drawn. In similar fashion cartoons are created, by countless cut-out figures, with movable limbs;

so it can be understood what an enormous amount of work is entailed in making a one-reel cartoon.

Disney holds the key to the film of the future, and although it may be hard to see in the antics of Mickey a solution to the problem of exactly how to apply sound to drama enacted by moving images, I feel sure that ultimately the perfect combination will evolve on parallel lines to the rhythmic cartoon of to-day.

Whilst dealing with "Shorts," as all one- and two-reelers are called, reference must be made to the Advertisement film, which appears from time to time, both disguised and unashamed.

Slowly but surely the film has become recognized as the greatest influence of the age, for better or worse, and commercial firms are taking advantage of this new power to advertise their goods, or perhaps I should modify that by saying that they are endeavouring to take advantage of it, for it is no easy matter to obtain a wide circulation for an advertisement film if it is purely and simply an advertisement film.

Despite this fact, there have sprung up a number of organizations which devote themselves to producing short reels for commercial concerns, and a few of these have achieved great success. Such productions are usually accepted by the smaller theatres, and exhibited, *not in their programmes*, but in addition to them, so that the audience shall not be deprived of the usual number of items which it has paid to see.

Instead of paying renting fees for these publicity films, exhibitors are paid to show them, and many object to doing so. The general reaction of an audience to an

advertisement film is not favourable, even in those cases where the film in question appears to be an entertainment until the end is reached, when the commodity being boosted is introduced into the plot.

The majority of these films are produced unimaginatively and crudely, but whether they have the desired advertisement effect, I would not attempt to say.

On the other hand, there have been films of a publicity nature which, when shown, have proved to be the best items on the programme. Several have been of an industrial character, shot and cut with real understanding of the values of sound and image, whilst I have only to mention again Grierson's *Drifters* to show to what heights a publicity film can reach. This film epic, publicizing the British fishing industry, places the advertisement film on an entirely new level, and points the way for Britain (and every other nation) to secure universal attention for her activities.

The circulation of a newspaper cannot be taken into comparison with the circulation of a film, and furthermore, the appeal and influence of the latter medium is infinitely stronger than that of the Press, for the visual message is far more readily assimilated to-day than the written word. Consequently, it is natural for commercial and manufacturing concerns to regard the screen in a new light, and even suspect it of superseding the poster. Unfortunately, however, the making and distribution of an advertisement film has been looked upon as an easy matter, until the experiment has been made. There are only one or two films in the *Drifters* class, compared with the many absurd "Buy my pills" type, which, curiously



PLATE XXV
A SCENE FROM *Drifters*
E.M.B. production

enough, seem more pleasing to the majority of advertisers, who do not appreciate the vastly superior power of indirect publicity, nor the fact that, when indirect, it stands a great chance of being regarded by exhibitors and public alike as a legitimate item for a programme.

Advertisement, direct or indirect, created primarily to boost goods is, of course, in a different category to publicity devised to draw attention to certain industries in general, as, for instance, the films made by such bodies as the Empire Marketing Board; for it is infinitely wiser to interest people in the work of fishing fleets than to make an advertisement film which tells the public to buy a certain brand of shrimp paste.

Different again is the skilled art of publicizing no less a thing than a nation, which America has done for so many years. This is no mere advertisement in the commercial sense of the word, but a carefully studied, ever-strengthening campaign to acquaint both her own people and those of other nations with her supremacy in many directions. Practically every American film contains national publicity introduced subtly, and without (prior to the Talkies) its international appeal being lessened.

This is effected in countless ways: American women are publicized in the shape of Stars symbolizing perfect womanhood. Films such as *Glorifying the American Show Girl* are intended to set an example to American girls (by offering them an ideal), and to show the world how beautiful American women are. Unbelievable pains are taken to make sure that American Stars are the most perfectly dressed people in the world, and Paris no longer sets the fashion, one reason being that a number



PLATE XXVI

AMERICA'S BEAUTIFUL WOMANHOOD—JOAN CRAWFORD
AND PAULINE FREDERICK

Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

of eminent dress designers have accepted highly-paid positions in Hollywood. There they devote themselves to creating clothes which, besides being the finest procurable, are so designed that they will be fashionable many months later when they appear in films released in, for instance, Great Britain, when they will be, if anything, in advance of existing fashions. It will be agreed that, whether women's clothes are of such major importance or not, the spirit behind this attention to detail is most praiseworthy.

Women featured in British films are sadly in need of similar attention, and it is time that our producers began to "glorify" them. They are every bit as good as, if not better than, their American rivals, but whatever attractions they may possess are hidden beneath their ill-fitting or very ordinary clothes. Screen actresses should set an example in dress and polish to the feminine portion of their audiences, instead of appearing dressed no better than those who pay to see them.

Clothes, however, are not the only things America publicizes. She shows the world, in her film sets, the ideal home; her stars advertise her latest automobiles; she features her locomotives, her ships and her police. Her cities and her hotels are boosted; her forces, too, as in *Dirigible* and countless other productions; also her music, as in *The King of Jazz*, which combined an unusual amount of imaginative work, brilliant camera movement, and artistic spectacle, with an advertisement for American Jazz in general and Paul Whiteman in particular, that was almost impudent in its directness.

All these things form backgrounds to America's

productions. Admittedly, they are backgrounds of a most solid nature, but they never distract from the story. This is the outcome of a complete realization of the enormous power of the film, and it is being utilized to the fullest extent by both America and Russia, except, of course, that in the latter country, the question of entertainment value is practically ignored.

Publicity, advertisement, propaganda—call it what you will—is going to play an increasingly important part in the film of the future. For reasons unknown, Britain has not taken advantage of film publicity, save in one or two cases when she has been inclined to permit the publicity to obscure the entertainment. Whether it is due to modesty or not I cannot say, but the wonders of Britain have received little attention from film-makers, and her industries, her cities, her ports, and her natural beauties still wait to be utilized as stages upon which to enact film dramas for the world.

Recent events show, however, that in this country there is taking place a definite awakening to the fact that there is all the difference in the world between advertisement and indirect publicity, and I am of the opinion that one development of the film of the future will be along such lines, both in legitimate productions, into which a judicious degree of publicity will be infused, and also in the making of publicity films for which exhibitors will be glad to pay. This will bring about the extinction of the crude advertisement film which adds such a prehistoric touch to British production when shown in theatre programmes

There is, however, one fruitful channel through which

a nation's industries can reach the public, without suffering by being looked upon as advertisement, nor even appearing as indirect publicity, and that is the interest and educational film. A certain proportion of these reels is frequently devoted to showing an interesting manufacturing process, and at its conclusion the audience remains in ignorance of the name of the firm demonstrating its methods. This point surely proves conclusively that the portrayal of such subjects on the screen is of real public interest, and justifies more elaborate treatment than an interest reel containing several short items can attempt.

There need be no story shortage whilst Britain's resources remain unproduced, and if they are filmed with understanding, there will be no scarcity of thrills and entertainment, for to dramatize the life of a modern nation is to create drama in the real, and not the artificial, sense of the word.

Before closing these references to film publicity which, in effect, has the result of educating or influencing the adult, I should like to refer to the question of educating the child by the medium of the screen. There is a link between the publicity and the educational film in so far as neither is of a theatrical nature. Apart from this, however, it is surprising that by this time the film has not been accepted in every school as a means of education in advance of most existing methods. There are a number of schools, equipped with projectors, which are making great headway in this direction, but they are as few as suitable films are. No official body has been created to produce and distribute an endless output of educational films both for schoolchildren and students, and, consequently, the scheme has not taken root. The suitability

of such films as *The Secrets of Nature*, and many of the industrial subjects made primarily for advertisement purposes, points the way, and an international exchange system of films, which would be shown in the schools of every civilized nation, might surely result in that fundamental understanding of every race by every other race which seems to be so difficult to achieve.

The position at present is that even those children fortunate enough to receive film education in schools have only to enter cinemas to see "the other kind of film" which, with few exceptions, is suitable only for adults, for, despite the grading of productions for various types of audiences, most present-day films which are quite harmless to adults are quite harmful to their offspring. It is no reflection whatever on film programmes to say that they demoralize children, for only films made for children can be really suitable for them. But it is not a commercial proposition to make films especially for children, and, as no national body has been formed to do so, the Film industry is blamed for the existing unsatisfactory state of affairs, whereas it would gladly lend its powers to the making of such films if financial support were given by Education Authorities.

* Once again, however, I would say that the production of such films will have to be approached with all the care and thought given to dramatic features, if maximum results are to be achieved.

Let us hope, therefore, that the future may see the establishment of an International League of Films, devoted to producing educational pictures for the rising generation, which will circulate in schools all over the world.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CINEMA OF TO-DAY AND TO-MORROW

PROFITS and prophets—Internationality

IT is now necessary, having studied the many and varied branches of film-making, to discover the most sensible attitude to adopt towards so important a medium. Have we arrived at any definite conclusion as to whether film-making is or can be an Art? Do we see the Film as a mammoth commercial proposition, or, on the other hand, as the most powerful medium through which to express propaganda, or both? What, in fact, is the reaction of the person of average intelligence to the Film? Or is it of no concern what that reaction is, providing films continue to offer profits and entertainment?

These and a hundred more questions arise when we consider the Cinema as a whole, and despite the fact that we now possess an insight into the making of films, we may find ourselves somewhat perplexed as to the ultimate form the Film will take, which will enable it to be universally accepted by all classes. Quite naturally, we anticipate that, as with all other creative arts, certain types of films will appeal to the majority, whilst others will be made primarily for the benefit of more educated people, but the basic method of constructing both or all types of films remains to be discovered.

As I have pointed out, there are to-day examples of film production far in advance of the commercial film, which make an immediate appeal to those who regard

the cinema seriously, but it should not be forgotten that with the development of an Art must go the mental development of the people for whom it is intended, and, therefore, it is not to be expected that a film of advanced technique can be appreciated by audiences educated only up, or shall we say down, to the standard of production which commercial films have reached to-day. A gradual, natural improvement, both in subject-matter and method of presentation, cannot but result in a natural development of understanding and consequent appreciation on the part of the public. Permit productions to remain at their present level, and the public mind will remain the same.

It would appear that at the present moment the Film is rapidly advancing in every direction, except in the one most vital to its existence. The magnificent cathedrals erected solely to present the Film under the most perfect conditions imaginable, together with the slickness of the modern Talkie, so polished, so technically flawless, yet so mechanical, so theatrical, so lacking in movement, definitely tend to blind us to the fact that the very foundations of the Film are not dug. It does not matter how great the seating capacity of a theatre is, how wonderful the proscenium curtain may be, how original the costumes of the ushers are, how thick the carpet upon which we tread, if the picture shown in this gorgeous frame is poor.

In every instance, it is the material things which have been "improved"—those aspects most easily tackled—whether they be the enlarging and glorifying of theatres, the increased importance of trade shows (now social events

of the first order), or the extravagance of the productions—all things which are the natural outcome of commercial success, admirable in their way and at the right time, but of comparatively little importance whilst the fundamentals either are dismissed or remain unperceived. Sufficient emphasis has already been laid on the importance of removing the shackles which hold down the Film, so let it only be said that until movement, hidden beneath a mountain of literary adaptations, is rediscovered, moving pictures will be moving only through projectors, and until studios realize that a story is not an essential to a great film, we shall continue to sacrifice the medium for the matter.

Discontent is divine, perhaps more so in the film industry than elsewhere, but to avoid being regarded as a pessimist when I am, in reality, the greatest of optimists, I would say that, in my judgment, some recent productions definitely show a most pronounced improvement, and a tendency to recognize a technique more closely allied to true sound than hitherto, as a brief and final survey will make clear.

Such films as Sternberg's *Dishonoured*, with its sustained-dissolve time-lapses, its rhythmic camera movement, and brilliant production values, whether in rainy studio streets, gorgeous palaces, or the fascinating apartment of X 27 (Marlene Dietrich) with its weird dancing dolls, are an advance on conventional production, and this in spite of its ridiculous story.

Then G. W. Pabst, creator of *Secrets of the Soul*, placed psycho-analysis before cinema audiences in an intensely dramatic and sensational manner. In this unique film we saw excellent camera-work, and trick photography,

a story created from what must have been a particularly well constructed scenario, and above all, a story which only the film could interpret so vividly. In many respects it was not a suitable subject for the screen, but I mention it here as being one of the productions which carry the Film forward. We have to thank Pabst for extracting the utmost expression possible from Greta Garbo in *Joyless Street* and Edith Jehanne in *Jeanne Ney*. Pabst handles his people quite differently from any other producer. I should call him a surgeon who does not enter the studio until he has analysed his patients, and discovered and categorized all their emotions. These he produces with unusual results. Garbo directed by Pabst is an utterly different being from Garbo in her Hollywood successes, whether in *Anna Christie* or the sweeter *Romance*. Pabst's contribution to War films, *Westfront 1918*, whilst exceptional in its vigorous treatment, powerful direction, and thrilling cutting, is not, for me, a great film, because it is definitely national in outlook and appeal, but in the group of producers on the Continent, one looks to Pabst for progress in the making of the Sound Film, together with René Clair, the brilliant Frenchman who, alone, has succeeded in juggling with images, cameras, and music in such a way that every one can understand the resultant combination. I hope that his future productions will continue with less direct dialogue and more descriptive sound allied to movement, a hope increased by his treatment of *Le Million*. Few directors possess his genius for burlesque and broad comedy, which is always prevented, at the psychological moment, from becoming ridiculous.

Lubitsch in Hollywood, both in *Mohite Carlo* and his Chevalier pictures, is making tremendous advances in film-making without lessening commercial values to exhibitors.

Chaplin's *City Lights*, though somewhat disappointing on the whole, is a definite challenge to the great god dialogue. In this comedy a brilliant opening, in which sound is made to play a satiric part by bleating in synchronism with the lip movement of pompous officials, leads us to expect an equally brilliant use of Sound throughout the picture. We are, however, disappointed in this respect, for though *City Lights* is undoubtedly a great comedy, containing countless original "gags" which are exceedingly funny, there is no ingenious use made of sound. Instead, an especially composed musical accompaniment, interspersed with more or less descriptive effects now and again, completes the synchronizing work, so that the total effect is almost identical with that of Chaplin's preceding silent comedies, with the exception, of course, of the opening scenes mentioned above. I quite thought that Chaplin would have created a sensation, so desirable just now, by proving the infinite superiority of sound over dialogue. Instead, the absence of dialogue, together with the absence of indirect sound, whilst making *City Lights* no less a success, makes it no greater than *The Circus* and *The Gold Rush*, from the point of view of advancing the sound film.

To a great extent I find a similarity between *City Lights* and *The Blue Express*, billed as the "First Russian Sound Picture." To compare a Chaplin comedy with a banned Russian feature may seem a trifle eccentric, but I am



PLATE XXVII
MAURICE CHEVALIER IN *Playboy of Paris*
Paramount

linking them together because of their similar treatment of sound. In *The Blue Express* some exceptionally appropriate music is heard, which definitely increases the dramatic value of the fast-moving sequences, but save for the reproduction of train whistles, bugles, and similar direct effects, the imaginative use of sound is not apparent. Coupled with this is the fact that throughout the picture the characters are *seen* to be talking, as they have been seen for years in silent films. In the case of *The Blue Express*, most of the characters are Chinese, so that had direct dialogue been employed, few European people would have been able to understand it, but had indirect speech been introduced in the manner I have previously indicated, the dramatic appeal would have assumed entirely different proportions. Either this should have been done, or no one in the picture should have been *seen* speaking. *The Blue Express*, like *City Lights*, is a sound film only inasmuch as it has a descriptive musical accompaniment, the effect of which on an audience is almost identical to watching a silent film accompanied by a cinema orchestra, save, of course, that these synchronized accompaniments definitely fit the picture. It should be understood that I am not commenting on *The Blue Express* as a picture, but solely with regard to its claim to be the "First Russian Film in Sound," for whilst it is an extremely fine film, I was disappointed with the lack of sound or speech in those places where it was obviously needed. Immediately a person is *seen* to speak on the screen, and his words are not heard, one feels something is lacking. This disappointment is, of course, due to the influence of the dialogue film, but since sound is within



PLATE XXVIII
City Lights
United Artists

the reach of the film, it should be employed for *indirect* speech in addition to reproducing the sounds of mechanical instruments.

As to the production of this film, which is by Ilya Trauberg, his work places him in a different group from Pudovkin or Eisenstein, for he is more direct in his methods, less, shall I say, thoughtful about his effects, and believes in portraying action that primarily appeals to the heart. In this film there is something rather primitive in the way he stages the clash between the slaves and the governing classes, though there is genius in his cutting, and his sense of rhythm is to be envied. *The Blue Express* contains photography which is uneven and often very bad, the lighting leaving much to be desired in certain sequences. Trauberg does not, it would appear, concern himself a great deal with picture composition. There is none of the beauty of *Earth* or *The End of St. Petersburg*—there is no idealistic imagery. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the picture offers no immediate opportunities for such work. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to see the same subject produced by Pudovkin or Eisenstein, when I feel the drama would be less crudely unfolded, and the elements introduced to symbolize the human battle being enacted on the train. But I am sure no one could improve on Trauberg's brilliant assembling of the strips. "Jog-g-g, Jog-g-g"—the engine has drawn its mutinous load out of the station, and the journey commences. Everything and everybody moves in rhythm—wheels, heads, glasses, plates, dancing feet, even a jelly wobbling (a bright touch). When the Governor is issuing orders for the quelling of the revolutionaries, his swinging

hand is as large as the screen. Up and down it saws, each impressive movement followed by a flash of a mighty gun raising its terrible mouth in the air; two arm movements, two guns. I was sorry to see Trauberg introduced the "flashback": peasants are speaking of bad times at home and saying the country is flooded, and we are shown a shot of flooded rice-fields. Peasants discuss what will happen if they do not defeat the soldiers on the train, and we see a shot of an executioner wielding his sword over a row of bared necks. Only rare circumstances excuse a "flashback," which cannot avoid disturbing flowing continuity. Nevertheless, *The Blue Express* is virile, it is definitely cinematic, and it successfully portrays a most difficult subject with amazing skill. I trust, however, that "The Second Russian Sound Picture" will present something more than a carefully prepared orchestral accompaniment, essential though this is, and will employ (but only if necessary) indirect speech, and utilize sound fully, or else remain silent. In either case, no lip movement should be visible.

Perhaps the most encouraging signs at the present moment are coming from English studios, where greater activity is to be found than ever before, and an increasing number of intelligent pictures are being produced. Walter Forde's *Ghost Train* was a signal success, and though lacking the freedom which an adaptation from a stage play cannot offer, it was definitely ingenious and acceptable. A. A. Milne's *Michael and Mary*, another stage adaptation, directed by Victor Savile, brought quality to the screen comparable with the finest American product, and is an exquisite thing despite it being essentially

a stage play. Victor Savile's subsequent production, *Sunshine Susie* breaks entirely fresh ground, and marks the beginning of a new method of approaching the sound film in British studios, which have realized that more Talk means Less Speed! Both films were made in Gainsborough's Islington Studios, which, together with the greatly enlarged Gaumont Studios at Shepherd's Bush, will be responsible for a large number of important productions in the immediate future. Without doubt, the standard of British productions has at last reached an extremely high level, and, once the language problem has been overcome, nothing will prevent them circulating throughout the world. Other British directors from whom we may expect work which will further the Film of the future are Anthony Asquith and Alfred Hitchcock. Asquith possesses more imagination than most, and an ability comparable with that of Soviet producers. Given a completely free hand, he would, I feel, create a film of great beauty and universal appeal. *Tell England*, and *Dance, Pretty Lady*, are not the type of films one expects from him, though they contain evidence of his genius both in picture-composition and cutting. I mention them because they are adaptations, and it would be more hopeful if our foremost producers left behind every tradition, and searched for their material beyond the world of literature. Hitchcock can be relied upon to create pictures which, above all else, are booking propositions, and, at the same time exhibit ingenuity, novel treatment, clear narration and good production. He is experienced. He has grappled with all sorts of productions, and all sorts of jobs in the making of them. He is one of those people who is

able to use his imagination without losing his balance, and in *Murder* he lifted the sound film over several of the barriers surrounding it. His name on the screen is a sign that an interesting production will follow, even though it may be based on a story which is inadequate. He counts because he can create the maximum effect from the minimum of material.

The newest version of *Carnival*, directed by Herbert Wilcox, is yet another vivid example of the tremendous advance in British production. Let us overlook the fact that we saw it on the stage years ago, and again on the silent screen a little later. For the third time we make acquaintance with it, and find it in advance of its previous versions. There is movement in *Carnival* the third, and an imaginative use of music. The ease with which Matheson Lang plays the part he must be so tired of, aids the production greatly, but if only the adaptation could be lost sight of for ever, freedom would result, and the definite signs of movement, apparent in recent productions, would develop into vibrating rhythm.

With such men as Asquith, Grierson, Hitchcock, Savile, and Wilcox, the advance will continue, but it cannot be wholly victorious whilst most of them concentrate upon material which, by reason of its literary or dramatic origin, will prevent them endeavouring to create something new and free, something which bears no resemblance to anything which has appeared before, something which will prove to a confused world that a film is a film and not a medium devoted solely to, and only capable of, re-creating works which have had their day in their own respective mediums.

Side by side with the above works of Britain's foremost directors is the slowly but surely increasing popularity of the exterior or natural film, of which *Rango* is a good example and *Trader Horn* a popular one. These films, in conjunction with Soviet productions, are bringing natural surroundings to the screen and putting the artificiality of the studio on one side. They are fascinatingly free of literary and theatrical tradition, and bringing to life the movement so desperately needed by the Film. They are no less dramatic nor picturesque because they are shot under natural conditions, and they are more definitely of the Film because they are portraying those things which other mediums cannot. They are further steps in the right direction, particularly as in some cases the characters appearing in such films have never before faced motion-picture cameras, a point which leads us to question the "star system" so fully developed in Hollywood, awakening in Britain, and ignored in Russia.

The making of film stars is a highly specialized business, involving the brains and patience of producers, camera-men, publicity experts and dressmakers. Stars can be and are made from the most unpromising material, and the reason they are made is because they will ultimately be able to make poor pictures successful, and successful pictures sensations, for it is no exaggeration to say that the majority of cinema-goers follow their stars. They cannot be induced to see those they dislike, and nothing will prevent them seeing those they idolize. By this system people frequently miss good films and witness poor ones.

I am not going to suggest that the star system is

fundamentally wrong and requires immediate abolition; that would be unnecessarily "highbrow," and indeed impossible. I know the enormous issues depending upon the commercial success or failure of a picture, and the part the star plays in settling that issue. Furthermore, I like lots of the stars, and enjoy watching them. Nevertheless, I am conscious of the fact that the perfect film should contain no stars, for the following reasons.

The majority of film stars are recruited from the stage (thereby creating yet another difficult link between the two mediums). This is because it is felt that their acting ability on the stage will enable them to make similarly good performances on the screen. I agree that their developed elocutionary powers stand them in good stead in dialogue films, and that their ease and assurance before the footlights will help them under the glare of studio lights, but I am of the opinion that their rightful place is on the stage, and the stage only, for by bringing their technique to the studio they are compelling the film to countenance stage methods. Quite naturally, the dialogue film has encouraged this system, and has resulted in a general exodus from the stage, and, also quite naturally, the Film has receded even farther into the background.

The fundamental difference between the stage and the Film is instantly realized when it is learnt that the cutter can make or mar a star. Remember that no sustained acting is required in the studio—a look here, a movement there, a close-up, a long shot, another glance, each shot being taken *time after time*, until the director is satisfied. And then the strips are assembled, rejected, reassembled,

until the total effect on the screen presents a complete study of that person doing something, or looking somewhere, in a manner of which she is conscious for the first time when she views the finished production. It is for this reason that there is a rather startling answer to the question, "Is it easy to act on the films?" namely, that "There is no acting, in the accepted sense of the word, on the films!"

Perhaps you have seen those comedies peopled entirely by animals—possibly monkeys, or birds. These creatures appear to act parts, and to do things which are positively uncanny. Of course, they do not, the uncanniness being created by the cutter who matches up all the short strips until they form a whole, which gives the impression that the monkey is typing a letter, the dog really breaking the prison bars, or the duck lassoing the chicken. This example will show the difference between the high standard of acting and histrionic ability demanded by the stage, and the requirements of the studio.

Russia has discovered that the Film does not need stars, and that it is a medium which, by reason of its patchwork form of construction, can convey the impression that people untutored in any of the dramatic arts are capable of offering performances more highly dramatic and emotional than those of their professional brethren. I trust I have made it clear that on the stage such people would be hopeless, and that it is because of the camera's ability to capture each of their countless expressions, which will ultimately be assembled to create new pictorial interpretations of them, that they are eminently suitable. But the Soviet film is not a commercial proposition, and

therefore cannot be taken as a criterion in this matter, at least not for the present. Let it be admitted, therefore, that commercially the star system is essential, but that the best stars should be sought anywhere but on the stage, though time, money, and patience will have to be spent in moulding them to perfection. Then one thing is certain, that they will not bring any stage traditions into the studio, and so in yet another way the two great mediums will be kept apart.

In conclusion, I feel that the Film of the future will be the outcome of the best work of those producers to whom I have referred, *plus* the influence of Soviet methods. The inevitable story shortage, which is for ever threatening, will ultimately result in producers making their films out of the raw material of life, which can provide episodes as beautiful and as exciting as the world of artifice.

The Film of the future will not be wholly the outcome of the hazy speculations and wholesale condemnations of the "highbrow," nor the questionable outlook and glittering output of commercial film kings. Both will contribute, and those who are not unduly influenced by either extreme will be the creators of it.

Producers of every type cannot but arrive ultimately at the truth about the Film. What is that truth? That Moving Image, Music, and Sound shall be woven together to form a pattern which is at once rhythmic, dramatic, beautiful, and *international* in its appeal.

Perhaps, a generation hence, people will not recognize the term "a British film," or an "American," "French," "Russian," or "German" film. They will, naturally, be able to detect the country of origin of a production by its

national characteristics, but their preferences will not depend on this, for a Film will be one of two things, good or bad. Where it comes from, which country has the greatest output, how much it cost, who the stars are—will be forgotten in the increased understanding of the newest, and what may perhaps become the greatest, of all the Arts—the Film.

APPENDIX

AMATEUR FILM SOCIETIES

SOME readers may possibly have been questioning the importance for them—the passive audience—of the criticism of production methods to which I have given so much space in this book. I should like to remind them that the making of films is within the reach of almost every one. The amateur film movement may very well become quite as important to the Cinema as the amateur stage has become to the professional theatre.

The amateur film-maker should not try to stage drama, or to make small-scale and inevitably pitiful imitations of "spectacles." He should go about the country (as, I must repeat, the Russian producers have done) watching for the subjects, the natural subjects, that make real Cinema—gulls flying, engines running, children rolling down hillsides, hands busily working—but he must discover them for himself and learn to pick out those which will make him a film. The whole of English life and English scenery is open to him: much of it has hardly been touched by the professional producer yet.

The expenses need not be heavy. A camera may cost less than a good motor-cycle, and the price may be shared among friends, who must inevitably collaborate together to make an amateur film. And the pleasure is endless—the pleasure of *creating* a film, of learning by one's mistakes and throw-outs, of correcting errors in

slow or fast *tempo*, in blurred photography, in amateur cutting. It is a pleasure that increases continually with improvement, and it is a pleasure that many English people have already discovered for themselves in the amateur film clubs which have been founded all over the country, and of whose existence I believe many readers may be ignorant. They give opportunity for practising every process in film-making, besides, as a rule, for witnessing films which are rarely or never exhibited in public. Mistakes are bound to be made by amateurs, and their resources must necessarily limit even the richest of clubs, but what they provide is the opportunity for experiment and adventure. Our English Eisenstein or Lubitsch may even now be making his first unrecognized essays in some private film club.

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